



Evaluating the Will Power/Won't Power[®] Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Program for Girls Ages 12 to 14

Evaluating a program to prevent teenage pregnancy and promote youth development

SUMMARY

From 1999 to 2007, Girls Incorporated[®] (Girls Inc.) and Mathematica Policy Research (under a subcontract) designed and conducted an evaluation of Will Power/Won't Power[®], a pregnancy prevention program for girls ages 12 to 14.

Will Power/Won't Power is one of four age- and developmentally appropriate components that comprise the Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy[®] program. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy advocates abstinence while providing practical information about pregnancy, risky behavior, contraception and protection.

While the study design was intended to provide a vigorous test of the Will Power/Won't Power program, the intended program model was not the program implemented, and program effects could not be reliably determined. In 2006, with approval from the funders, the research team revised the study to examine implementation lessons and analyze data such as connections between girls' sexual activity and their relationships with their parents.

Key Findings

- Girls who participated in Will Power/Won't Power reported greater exposure through class or programs to topics in reproduction/pregnancy and saying no to sex, sexually transmitted infections and menstruation. Girls in the program group were more knowledgeable about risk and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. There was no difference in other factors such as attitudes towards teenage sex or view of self.
- Girls with school-reported higher grades in reading classes were significantly less likely to initiate sex compared with girls who had lower grades.
- The better the relationship a girl said she had with her mother, the less likely it was that she engaged in sexual activity.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported the evaluation with two grants totaling \$548,356, \$500,000 of which was part of \$1 million in matching funds required by the [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#), which contributed \$2 million to the evaluation.

THE PROBLEM

AIDS Surveillance in Adolescents, a 1998 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reported that one in three ninth-grade girls and six in 10 twelfth-grade girls have had sexual intercourse. About 20 percent of sexually active high school girls become pregnant each year.

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are becoming a greater problem among teenage girls. According to the CDC report, about half of AIDS cases in people ages 13 to 19 are among girls, compared with less than one-quarter of AIDS cases among people age 25 and higher.

Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy®

[Girls Incorporated](#) (Girls Inc.) is a national youth organization that "inspires *all* girls to be strong, smart and bold." Formerly called Girls Clubs of America, Girls Inc. maintains a headquarters in New York City and a National Resource Center in Indianapolis that provides training, evaluation and research services. The organization has 97 affiliates across the United States and Canada.

In 1999, more than 350,000 young people enrolled in Girls Inc. programs held in some 1,000 Girls Inc. centers, YWCAs and schools.

In 1985, Girls Inc. created Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy®. The program advocates abstinence and is based on providing "real-world" accurate information about pregnancy, risky behaviors, contraception and protection. It features four age- and developmentally appropriate components:

- ***Growing Together***SM, a five-session program for girls ages 9 to 11 and a parent or other adult. Workshops focus on improving communication about physical development, sexuality and family and personal values.
- ***Will Power/Won't Power***[®], a 10-session program for girls ages 12 to 14. Will Power/Won't Power teaches girls that sexual expression can be positive and healthy, but that engaging in sexual intercourse is not the norm at this age. It helps girls take charge of their sexual lives and resist pressure to begin having sexual intercourse. See [Appendix 1](#) for a more complete description of Will Power/Won't Power.

- ***Taking Care of Business***[®], a 10-session program for young women ages 15 to 18. Workshops help participants recognize and move beyond narrow female stereotypes, develop personal values, act assertively and learn about STDs, HIV and contraception.
- ***Health Bridge***SM, a health care services program. Health practitioners provide information, assessment and counseling to girls. Clinics provide services including reproductive health care, STD/HIV testing, pregnancy testing and contraceptives.

Programs take place either at a Girls Inc. facility or at a school. From 1985 to 1998, more than 175,000 girls and young women participated in components of the Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy program.

CONTEXT

RWJF has supported an array of efforts to prevent teen pregnancy around the country, including the [National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#). They are described in a chapter in Volume XI of RWJF's Anthology. A number of evaluations have also been funded. Projects include:

- Best Friends youth development program; RWJF supported an external evaluation, but it did not take place (see [Program Results](#) for more information).
- A Best Friends/Diamond Girls Leadership Program for high school students in Newark, N.J. See [Program Results](#) for more information.
- The Sisters Program in the Bronx, N.Y.; an evaluation was underway at the time the RWJF grant ended. See [Program Results](#) for more information.

THE PROJECT

In early 1999, RWJF provided a planning grant to Girls Inc. (ID# 035239) to design an evaluation of Will Power/Won't Power, the component of its Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy program serving ages 12 to 14. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of Will Power/Won't Power in helping girls and young women delay sexual intercourse, postpone pregnancy and childbearing and avoid sexually transmitted infections.

At RWJF's suggestion, staff at Girls Inc. collaborated with researchers at [Mathematica Policy Research](#) (a research and policy organization based in Washington) in designing the evaluation; Mathematica participated through a subcontract from Girls Inc. At the time, Mathematica was also evaluating federally funded "abstinence-only" teen pregnancy prevention programs. RWJF staff believed that Mathematica's involvement in assessing both abstinence-only initiatives and Will Power/Won't Power, which features information regarding contraception and family planning, could enhance the evaluation.

The Initial Design

Girls Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research designed an eight-year \$9.7-million evaluation involving 4,500 girls at 10 Girls Inc. affiliates. Half the girls would be randomly assigned to participate in Will Power/Won't Power. The other half would serve as a control group. Both participants and controls would be surveyed four times over five years.

Girls Inc. submitted the evaluation proposal to RWJF and the [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#) in May 1999. Both foundations declined to fund the evaluation as proposed but asked Girls Inc. and Mathematica to modify the design to make it less extensive and less costly.

A Revised Proposal

In March 2000, Girls Inc. and Mathematica proposed a scaled-back evaluation entitled "Girls Shape the Future." This study was estimated to cost \$3 million over seven years and included:

- Two Girls Inc. affiliates that would recruit 1,000 girls.
- Random assignment of girls into Will Power/Won't Power or a control group.
- Surveys at baseline and three and five years later.
- A qualitative evaluation involving focus groups, interviews and observations.
- Analysis of school grades and test scores for some or all participants.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation agreed to provide \$2 million for the study, \$1 million of which was a challenge grant contingent on Girls Inc. raising \$1 million in matching funds. Matching funds came from:

- RWJF: \$500,000 (ID# 037161).
- An Anonymous Foundation: \$300,000.
- [Turner Foundation](#): \$200,000.

The [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) subsequently provided \$400,000, allowing researchers to:

- Add a follow-up survey after one year.
- Conduct additional analyses regarding family factors that influence teen pregnancy.
- Analyze costs of delivering Will Power/Won't Power.

Conducting the Evaluation

Heather Johnston Nicholson, Ph.D., directed the project for Girls Inc., and Anu Rangarajan, Ph.D., directed it for Mathematica Policy Research.

Girls were eligible for participation in Girls Shape the Future if they:

- Volunteered.
- Were between ages 12 and 14 (the age range for Will Power/Won't Power).
- Had not participated in prior Girls Inc. programs.
- Secured parental permission.
- Understood they might be randomly assigned to the control group.

Most (91 percent) but not all study participants completed the baseline survey. Although it was part of the intake process, it was not a requirement for study participation.

Girls Inc. National Resource Center:

- Recruited Girls Inc. affiliates to serve as sites for the study.
- Trained staff of affiliates to deliver Will Power/Won't Power to girls.
- Funded affiliates for training, travel and incentives related to the study.
- Provided assistance to affiliates in recruiting girls and resolving problems.

Girls Inc. affiliates:

- Recruited girls into the study.
- Delivered Will Power/Won't Power to girls in the experimental group.

Mathematica Policy Research staff, with local research consultants:

- Randomly assigned girls to Will Power/Won't Power or to a control group.
- Administered surveys of evaluation participants.
- Visited sites to conduct focus groups and interviews.

Mathematica Policy Research and Girls Inc. staffs created and pilot-tested the baseline and follow-up surveys, drawing from surveys Mathematica developed to evaluate the federally funded teen pregnancy initiatives.

Girls completed surveys in writing, generally in the presence of Mathematica Policy Research staff or local research consultants. Baseline surveys asked about such factors as:

- Peer group influence.

- Involvement in various social or educational activities.
- Level of attachment to school.
- Relationship to parents.
- Knowledge of and views about sexual activity and sexually risky behaviors.

Follow-up surveys asked about:

- Knowledge, attitudes and behaviors about sexual activity and pregnancy.
- Friends' attitudes and experiences with sexual activity.
- Peer pressure to engage in or avoid sexual activity.
- Quality of communication with their parents.
- School attendance and achievement.

Recruitment Challenges

The study design proved to pose a significant challenge to recruitment. The two Girls Inc. affiliates originally selected to participate were unable to secure a large enough sample because of resistance from several school superintendents, who were uncomfortable with participating in the study because of increasing pressure to improve grades. To address this issue, Girls Inc. recruited five new affiliates for the study for four states, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts and two in Texas.

However, even with the larger number of evaluation sites, recruiting subjects continued to pose a challenge, because of the requirement that subjects not have participated in Girls Inc. programs prior to the study. Girls often join Girls Inc. early in their lives, some starting as young as five or six. Those girls who were asked to join for the first time at age 12 were less interested, had competing interests and were less connected to the program if they did join.

- The Site 1 program was delivered during the school day in three public middle schools (413 girls).
- The Site 2 program was delivered in after-school sessions in five public schools (202 girls).
- The Site 3 program was delivered in after-school sessions held at three schools and one community center (125 girls).
- The Site 4 program was delivered at two local Girls Inc. centers (52 girls).
- The Site 5 program was delivered at four schools after school hours (40 girls).

Site 5 withdrew from the study in 2002. The affiliate had hoped to use the study to establish connections with new schools, but soon realized that it could not begin these relationships by offering a program that was not available to all girls who wanted it.

Of the 832 girls eventually recruited, 428 were assigned to participate in Will Power/Won't Power and 404 to a control group. Girls enrolled in the study reflected the minority and low-income population generally served by Girls Inc. programs:

- 19 percent were White.
- 42 percent were African American.
- 26 percent were Hispanic.
- 69 percent received free or reduced-price lunches at school.

Programmatic Challenges

The evaluation design also posed unanticipated program implementation challenges. Because girls had a more tenuous connection to Girls Inc., of those girls enrolled in Will Power/Won't Power, only about 30 percent actually attended the program. Girls who did attend attended only 4.5 hours of the 15 hours specified in the model. Evaluation sites found it difficult to deliver the program as intended within the school environment. In-school class periods of 45 minutes conflicted with the 90-minute sessions of the Will Power/Won't Power curriculum. Unscheduled school events, such as field trips, took precedence over Will Power/Won't Power sessions.

These shortcomings in program delivery led Girls Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research to conclude that "the study could not reliably estimate the effects of the program curriculum."

In 2006, with permission from its funders, Girls Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research amended the study. They discontinued collecting three-year follow-up data in all sites except Site 1, and stopped collecting five-year follow-up data in all locations. By the end of the evaluation:

- 699 girls (84 percent) completed the first follow-up survey, administered about 16 months after enrolling in the study.
- 493 girls (65 percent) completed the second follow-up survey, administered about 42 months after enrolling in the study.

The researchers also dropped the analysis of school grades and test scores.

Mathematica Policy Research and Girls Inc. staff redirected resources to:

- Identifying and understanding implementation lessons.

- Analyzing data already collected to explore factors such as the connections between girls' sexual activity and the quality of their relationships with their parents.

Communications

As of July 2008, researchers at Girls Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research were finalizing two reports of the project, covering:

- Early predictors of girls' sexual activity.
- Lessons learned from the effort to evaluate Will Power/Won't Power.

Project staff presented preliminary findings of the study at the 2005 conference of the American Public Health Association, the 2007 conference of the American Evaluation Association and a 2008 conference of the Society Research on Adolescents.

See the [Bibliography](#) for more information.

FINDINGS

The researchers reported the following findings to RWJF:

Findings Regarding the Effectiveness of Will Power/Won't Power

These findings are based on analyses of girls who had completed first-year follow-up surveys.

- **Girls who participated in the Will Power/Won't Power program reported greater understanding of the risks and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases than those in the control group.**
- **There was no difference between the two groups in self-reported:**
 - Attitudes towards sex.
 - Views of self.
 - Substance use.
 - Peer influences and relationships.
- **Significant results were found only in the evaluation site that had the highest enrollment and participation rate.** The Site 1 schools, where 89 percent of enrolled girls attended program sessions, have a history of involvement with Girls Inc. and offered Will Power/Won't Power as a regular class during the school day.

Findings Regarding the Early Predictors of Girls' Sexual Activity

These findings are based on analyses of information from 353 girls who completed both first-year and third-year follow up surveys and who had not had sexual intercourse between their baseline and first-year follow up surveys.

- **The better the relationship a girl said she had with her mother, the less likely it was that she reported having engaged in sexual activity.** Girls with the least positive relationships with their mothers were 2.5 times more likely to report sexual activity than those with the most positive relationships. The quality of girls' self-reported relationships with their fathers had no significant impact.
- **Girls' who reported being accepting of premarital sex and sex among teens were more likely to initiate sex at an earlier age than girls who are less accepting.**
- **Girls with higher grades (based on school-reported grades in the most recent reading class) were significantly less likely to report initiating sex than girls with lower grades.**
- **Some 93 girls (28 percent) reported having sexual intercourse between the first- and third-year follow-up surveys, up from 3 percent at baseline.**

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **When using a control group in an evaluation, make sure at the outset that sites are oversubscribed and there is strong interest in receiving the programming.** Lack of interest will make it hard to recruit enough subjects for both experimental and control groups. Lack of interest and participation among those assigned to the experimental group will weaken the effect of the intervention. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
2. **When conducting an evaluation, do not choose criteria that make it difficult to recruit participants.** This study targeted sixth graders who had no prior involvement with or allegiance to Girls Inc. More typically, girls join Girls Inc. at younger ages and remain involved as they grow older. This criterion made it difficult to recruit participants and to measure outcomes based on typical patterns. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
3. **If the program being evaluated must be altered, be sure to preserve key features of its structure and curriculum.** Often, some program features can be amended, but these amendments should not interfere with the integrity of the intervention. In this study, Girls Inc. affiliates had to reduce the number or length of sessions to accommodate school schedules. These accommodations weakened the program to the extent that researchers concluded the program model being evaluated was not implemented. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)

4. **Monitor and understand program attendance early in an evaluation.** Some recruitment and attendance problems were not identified until project staff began analyzing outcomes some 18 to 24 months later. Earlier detection would have provided an opportunity for staff to intervene and boost participation rates. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
5. **If necessary, assist the agencies delivering the program being evaluated in attaining high participation rates.** Some problems, such as transportation to after-school programs, might be resolved if researchers and overall program managers work with local administrators to identify ways to transport children. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
6. **When challenges confront an evaluation, find ways to use the experience as a learning opportunity.** In this situation, low participation made it impossible for researchers to assess the intervention's effectiveness, but it created an opportunity for them to utilize data in other useful ways. They analyzed the attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual activity of girls who enrolled in Girls Inc. programs and the factors that influenced those attitudes and behaviors. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
7. **Utilize evaluation organizations with deep expertise when evaluating complex community-based interventions.** This study benefited from the depth and breadth of knowledge of the Mathematica Policy Research staff, who had extensive experience designing and executing multi-site research projects. The study would not have progressed as well had less experienced or smaller organizations been utilized. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
8. **Program and research organizations should collaborate in evaluating community-based interventions.** Girls Inc. staff's leadership and involvement helped affiliates join the study and accept its findings. Staff knowledge of the field helped evaluators understand local priorities and pressures. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)
9. **Begin complex evaluations with pilot studies or implement them in phases.** Starting small allows program operators and researchers to detect and resolve problems before they seriously affect services or outcomes. Be prepared to make midcourse changes if problems arise later in the study. (Project Directors/Girls Inc. and Mathematica)

AFTERWARD

Study staff at both Girls Inc. and Mathematic Policy Research is eager to share the learning from this study, both in terms of research methods and knowledge gained about girls. Staff members plan to author articles for submission to peer-reviewed journals.

Girls Inc. staff is planning internal discussions to consider ways that the learning about girls influences the ongoing programmatic work that the organization does. Staff also plans to summarize the learning about girls to broadly share with its affiliate community, experts in the field, teachers and educators, parents and the public at large.

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APPENDIX 1

The Will Power/Won't Power Curriculum

Session 1: Introduction. This session provides an overview of the program. It also includes a module entitled "Romantic Relationships: What Helps, What Hurts" for girls to identify what works and what is unhealthy for girls in relationships.

Session 2: Reproductive Health/Sexuality Review. This session includes a "Female Health and Hygiene Presentation" that gives girls information about normal female reproductive health and personal hygiene. A "Myth Information Game" helps girls determine myth or fact statements.

Session 3: Basic Assertiveness. This session includes a video or presentation that helps girls clarify two assertive behaviors: making and refusing requests. Girls practice in pressure-situation role plays.

Session 4: Identifying Sexual Pressures. This session starts with "Analyzing Media Messages" for their sexual content to counteract the impact of popular culture. It helps girls identify dating pressures and risky situations, including negative consequences of early sexual activity.

Session 5: Looking at Values. This session starts with a "Values Auction" in which girls purchase values with play money. A module on "Examining Values" encourages girls to determine peer, family and personal attitudes about having sexual intercourse. A module "Have You Weighed Your Decision?" helps girls evaluate the reasons why a teenager would decide to have or not to have intercourse.

Session 6: The Case for Abstinence. This session includes "Redefining Abstinence" to identify the complex array of intimate behaviors other than abstinence. "Don't Let It Happen' to You" helps girls recognize the signs of potential sexual intercourse and identify strategies for changing a situation that looks like it could lead to intercourse.

Session 7: Resisting Sexual Pressure. "Debating the Subject of Abstinence" lets girls hone communication skills and develop positive arguments for abstinence. This module also explores negative arguments for abstinence, noting that experience shows these arguments usually lose the debate. Girls practice ways of saying "no" to pressure in a module entitled "Making Your Case: Pressure Lines."

Session 8: Defending Your Decision: Look at the Risks! "The Pregnancy Probability Game" helps increase girls' awareness of the pregnancy risks from intercourse. Girls also learn how easily sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are transmitted and the risks of HIV infection associated with a range of sexual behaviors. "Letters to Lydia" uses

newspaper advice-column letters to explore the emotional consequences of early sexual activity and to reconsider abstinence as an option.

Session 9: Sister Support System. In "Exploring Sisterhood" and "Standing Up for One Another," girls examine their attitudes about girls and women in order to develop positive and supportive relationships. A Pledge of Peer Support enables girls to form a sorority, if they want, to maintain motivated support.

Session 10. Putting It All Together. "Test Your 'Won't Power'" and scripted role plays reinforce assertiveness skills, including following through on decisions in the face of peer pressure. This session also includes supplemental activities on Sexual Development and Contraception/Protection.

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