

Jakitsch B. & Barry, F. (1990. January/February). Adolescent abuse forums: Improving services for maltreated adolescents. Children Today, 19(1), 13-15.

OVERVIEW

Adolescents are abused in equal proportions to younger children.

Most adolescents in child protective systems have a history of abuse.

Abused adolescents are a special high-risk group. Negative behaviors common to this group include running away, substance abuse, delinquency, school dysfunction, pregnancy, prostitution, and suicide.

Abused adolescents often rely on a number of organizations, including social service agencies, juvenile systems, and private establishments. Abused girls typically exhibit victim-oriented behaviors, bringing them in contact with mental health and psychiatric agencies. Generally, abused boys display aggressive behaviors that are dealt with through justice and law enforcement systems. Maltreated youths often employ the services of several agencies who are usually unaware of each others' roles in the treatment of the individual.

The Adolescent Abuse Forum resulted from research conducted by the STAR (Statewide Teamwork for Abused Runaways) Project developed by Cornell University's Family Life Development Center. Between 1985 and 1987, STAR developed and tested several approaches for training and coordinating staff members from various agencies that work with abused adolescents. The research spanned ten counties in New York State. The most popular model to emerge from these studies was the Adolescents Abuse Forum, a model involving joint training and coordination of activities for staff from two or more agencies.

PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

The Adolescent Abuse Forum seeks to bring together front-line and supervisory staff representing different agencies in the same community in order to more effectively address the problem of adolescent abuse in the community.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

- To provide training regarding adolescent maltreatment.
- To clarify agency roles with regard to abused adolescents.
- To facilitate formal and informal coordination among the various systems serving abused adolescents.

FUNCTION OR ACTIVITIES OF THE PROGRAM

The Adolescents Abuse Forum meets as a day-long event. Participating agencies may represent child protection, foster care, preventive services, probation, runaway and homeless shelters, juvenile aid, police departments, schools, mental health, and private youth and family services.

Each forum is planned by a small committee composed of representatives from the STAR project and from the major agencies involved. The STAR project has developed a planning guide to assist in this phase of the operation. The representatives informally discuss the specific needs to be addressed around the three major objectives outlined above.

The first session consists of training on a specific area relating to adolescent abuse, such as interviewing abused adolescents or working with families.

Time is also allotted to each major agency to discuss its mission, procedure, and limitations. This helps to clarify agency roles and dispel unrealistic expectations of agencies based on insufficient knowledge.

The next session consists of various exercises designed to enable cooperation among the various agencies. One exercise is called "Needs and Gives." Participants from the various agencies work in small groups to list what they need from the other agencies. Next, they list what they can give to the other agencies. The small groups are given fifteen minutes to work on each list. Then results are shared with the entire group.

Another exercise involves the use of a case study in small groups. Each small group contains representatives from each of the various agencies. The groups spend half an hour studying a case model involving an abused adolescent. After identifying the issues involved, each group develops a plan for intervention. The plan should demonstrate how the related

agencies can coordinate to help the adolescent in question. The intervention plans are then shared and discussed with the larger group.

At the end of the afternoon, participants return once again to their small groups to brainstorm general suggestions for improving community services to maltreated adolescents. After reporting these ideas to the large group, the participants complete an evaluation form offering comments for improving the program.

FUNDING AND STAFFING

The forums were staffed by STAR personnel, paid consultants, and local experts. Communities should locate as many local resource people as possible before seeking outside help.

Funding was usually shared between Cornell and the county or community. Communities wishing to use the forum model will probably need to share funding among the various agencies involved.

The nature of the forum as a one-time event eliminates the need for ongoing funding and continuous demands on human resources.

tone and testimonies of the program

- It has become the most popular model developed and tested by the STAR project.
- No other model has involved so many people directly.
- Participants think that the forum strengthened personal networking relationships among the agencies.
- Participants feel the forum improved work relationships with their colleagues.
- Participants believe the forum has enhanced services for abused adolescents.

IMPLICATIONS

- 1.The Adolescent Abuse Forum is a helpful model for all workers who desire to network with other people sharing similar concerns.
- 2.Workers who maintain regular contact with maltreated adolescents might consider organizing a similar forum in their community.
- 3.All persons concerned about adolescent abuse can benefit from

attending such a forum.

4. Forums may be organized around other areas of concern—such as homeless families, victims of domestic violence, people with AIDS, etc.
5. Youth workers can employ the forum model in networking among other youth programs, community agencies, churches, etc.

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