

ADOLESCENT PARTICIPANTS IN A WILDERNESS-BASED CHALLENGE:
AN EVALUATION OF A
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PREVENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract

A theoretical eclectic model adopting a preventive approach to address adolescents at-risk of offending was created. Salient features were then utilised to assess a primary and secondary prevention program in practice.

The sample (N = 62) consisted of 44 male and 18 female voluntary adolescents between 15 and 25 years of age, from all geographical areas within Tasmania, Australia. Conducted between September 1992 and October 1994, the study utilised a quasi-experimental recurrent institutional, non-parametric (pre-post-follow-up) design as a control measure, to gauge maturational changes over a 12 month period of 11 groups of participants.

Program effect was established through significant post minus pre participant general self-esteem and self-actualisation gain scores. Subsequent gender analysis found that female participants attained greater initial short-term gains in areas of social self-esteem (new peer relationships) and self-actualisation (personal insights). Conversely, longitudinal gains (pre to follow) were evidenced in the male sample in areas of general and personal self-esteem. Cross-sectional age - maturational analysis found significant personal self-esteem (happiness) gains achieved longitudinally by the early (i.e. 13 - 15) and in the short-term by the late (i.e. 19 - 21) adolescent groups of both genders.

On the basis of these results, it is posited that the gender neutral physical demands of this wilderness-based program assisted female adolescent participants in gaining a more accurate and positive understanding of their social and personal

attributes and abilities. Adolescent males appear to begin the program with an overestimation of their physical selves. Post activity loss of bravado occurs amongst male peers, potentially signalling a less competitive atmosphere and possible opportunity for development of self.

The effect of this program as a catalyst preventing primary participants initial contact with court proceedings and reducing secondary prevention participants further involvement over a twelve month period was substantiated. The program provides the stimulus to assist with the actualisation of potential, manifesting most significantly within the community in educational and employment outcomes by 68% of the participants within this sample. It is surmised that this process works as an "anti-depressant inoculation" particularly for the more mature, in that psychological strength is attained positively influencing post behavioural patterns. Perhaps an alternative perspective is that post course euphoria leaves a lingering positive affect.

Recommendations for future research are included.