

Evaluation of the *Willing to Wait*[®] Program

Background

During the five school years from fall 2015 to spring 2020, over 15,000 middle school students and 5,000 high school students in West Michigan participated in *Willing to Wait*[®]. *Willing to Wait* is a sexual risk avoidance program that includes 6 to 8 weekly lessons that address topics such as healthy relationships, consent, refusal skills, teenage pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

The Center for Social Research at Calvin University partnered with the PRC of Grand Rapids to design and implement an evaluation of the *Willing to Wait* program. This evaluation took the form of a pre-program vs. post-program research design.

Method

At both the beginning and end of their involvement in the *Willing to Wait* program, students were invited to complete an 8-question survey that assessed their knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions related to premarital sex. For example, they were asked to select “yes,” “no,” or “not sure” for each of the following questions:

- Knowledge: Using a condom is a 100% sure way to prevent getting a sexually transmitted infection.
- Attitude: It’s ok to have sex if I’m in love, even if I’m not married.
- Behavioral intention: I plan on waiting until marriage to have sex (or to have sex again).

Willing to Wait staff members identified one preferred answer option for each question. For example, “no” was the preferred answer option to the first two questions listed above and “yes” was the preferred answer option to the third question. A score from 0 to 8 was calculated for each survey by summing the number of questions answered in the preferred manner.

21,864 students completed the survey at the beginning of the program and 21,466 students completed the survey at the end of the program. 14,850 matched pairs of pre-program and post-program surveys from the same student were identified.

Results

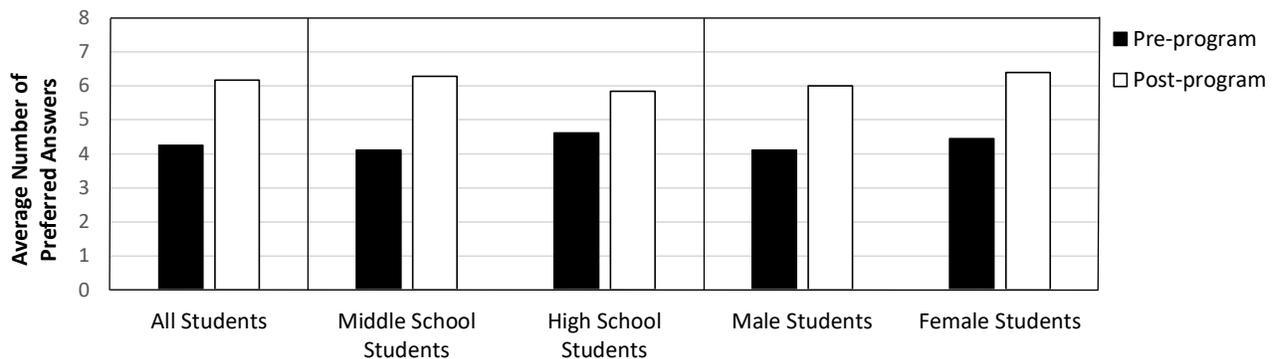
On average, students answered 4.25 questions ($SD = 2.07$) with *Willing to Wait*’s preferred answer options before the program. Students answered an average of 6.16 questions ($SD = 1.90$) with the

preferred answer options at the end of the program. This increase of nearly two more questions answered in the preferred direction was statistically reliable, $t(43,328) = 100.16, p < .001$.

The change in students' responses from the pre-program survey to the post-program survey was also evident when separately examining each of the three sub-scales—those measuring attitudes, knowledge, and behavioral intentions. The changes were statistically reliable whether data from all students or only those students who completed both surveys were analyzed.

Furthermore, these increases remained statistically reliable when examining data from sub-groups of students, including students from each school year; middle school students or high school students; male students or female students; and students attending public schools, charter schools, or private religious schools. In other words, all groups of students—regardless of their grade or gender or the type of school they attended—answered notably more questions with the preferred response after participating in *Willing to Wait* than they did before their participation.

Figure: The average number of questions answered with the preferred response on the pre-program survey and post-program survey for all students (left), middle school students and high school students (center), and male students and female students (right). All changes were statistically reliable at the $p < .001$ level.



Conclusion

Based on these results, the *Willing to Wait* program changed students' self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions: Students had more accurate knowledge of the effectiveness of birth control and consequences of premarital sex, reported less favorable attitudes toward premarital sex, and were more likely to report that they intended to wait until marriage to have sex after their participation than they did before their participation.

Given the limited duration of this pre-program vs. post-program research design, it is not yet clear whether these short-term changes in students' self-reported attitudes, knowledge, and behavioral intentions will be sustained for longer periods of time or will lead to changes in actual sexual behavior in the coming years.

In summary, this evaluation indicates that *Willing to Wait* is effective at changing adolescents' short-term knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions related to premarital sex.

Written by

Laura Luchies, PhD

August 2020