

Promoting Protection Community Wide: Effects of the Communities That Care Prevention System

Original research published in *Prevention Science* (2015)

Kevin P. Haggerty
Director

Sabrina Oesterle
Assistant Director

J. David Hawkins
Richard F. Catalano
Founders

MISSION of SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- ◆ Conduct research on factors that influence development
- ◆ Develop and test the effectiveness of interventions
- ◆ Study service systems and work to improve them
- ◆ Advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems
- ◆ Disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research

Community-wide preventive interventions target both risk and protective factors to reduce problem behaviors and promote healthy youth development. Previous research has shown that the Communities That Care (CTC) prevention planning system reduces elevated risk factors and prevents adolescent problem behaviors.

Communities That Care does not focus exclusively on risk, however. At the heart of CTC implementation is the Social Development Strategy (SDS). The SDS seeks to provide youth with opportunities, skills, and recognition for prosocial (positive social) involvements and interactions in order to strengthen bonding. Bonding is hypothesized to promote acceptance of social standards, which in turn leads to prosocial behavior. These factors, which promote positive behaviors and protect against the development of problem behaviors, are called **protective factors**.

In CTC, all community members are encouraged to use the Social Development Strategy in their daily interactions with young people. Yet, to date, no study has examined CTC's effect on protective factors.

Researchers at the Social Development Research Group wanted to know whether CTC could significantly promote positive development among youth by:

1. Creating opportunities and recognition for prosocial involvement and interaction in youth's daily lives, and
2. Ensuring that youth learn the skills needed to succeed in these involvements and interactions.

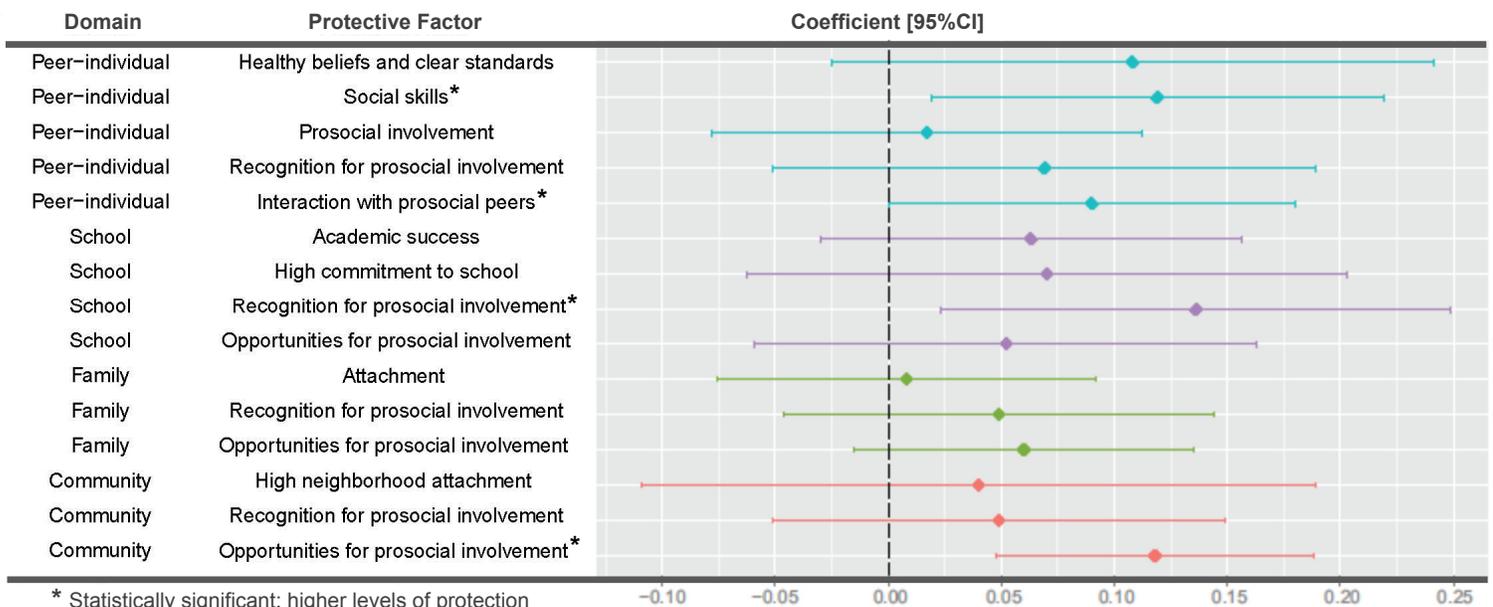
Methods

Data for this study came from the Community Youth Development Study (CYDS), a community-randomized trial of CTC in 12 experimental communities compared to 12 control communities.

Key Messages

- *The Communities That Care (CTC) prevention planning system promotes positive development among youth by creating opportunities, developing skills, and providing recognition for prosocial involvement.*
- *Analyses across all protective factors found significantly higher levels of overall protection among youth in CTC communities compared to youth in control communities.*
- *Analyses across domains of influence found significantly higher levels of protection among CTC youth in their communities and schools and in peer/individual interactions, but not in their families.*

Figure 1 – Adjusted differences in mean levels of eighth-grade protective factors comparing CTC to control communities



* Statistically significant: higher levels of protection in CTC communities ($p \leq 0.05$)

As part of the randomized trial, a longitudinal panel of 4,407 fifth graders was followed (starting in 2004) using the Youth Development Survey (YDS), a self-administered paper survey. The YDS measured fifteen specific protective factors divided into four domains of influence: peer/individual, family, school, and community. This research used global test statistics (GTS) to examine the overall difference in protective factor scores in Grade 8 (2007), controlling for Grade 5 (2004) protective levels. The same technique was used to examine the level of protection in each domain. For each individual protective factor, mean-level differences were examined.

Results

The GTS across all protective factors indicated that the overall level of protection was significantly higher

among youth in CTC communities than for youth in control communities at the end of Grade 8. This overall effect appears to be due to increases in protection in every domain except one: family. The CTC communities showed higher protection in the community, school, and peer-individual domains. The adjusted mean-level differences of the fifteen protective factors are shown in Figure 1 above.

Conclusion

Using the SDS within the CTC planning system had a positive effect in increasing the overall levels of protection community wide. As communities consider prevention strategies, it important to enhance protective factors while reducing risk factors. CTC is a helpful way of incorporating protection into community planning efforts.

For additional information on this topic, please refer to the original article:

Kim, B. K. Elizabeth, Gloppen, Kari M., Rhew, Isaac C., Oesterle, Sabrina, Hawkins, J. David (2015). **Effects of the Communities That Care prevention system on youth reports of protective factors.** *Prevention Science, 16(5), 652-662.*

This research was supported by research grant R01 DA015183-03 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, with co-funding from the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.



Visit us on the web: sdrg.org

For more information about Communities That Care visit: communitiesthatcare.net