

Developmental Differences of Elementary School Children in Knowledge Acquisition Following a Sexual Abuse Prevention Program

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Abstract : Child sexual abuse (CSA) in Greece is a highly prevalent phenomenon and yet remains largely underreported. CSA can negatively impact cognitive, emotional and psychosocial development, as well as personality formation and capacity for initiation and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships. It is particularly important for school-based prevention programs to be implemented early in elementary school, as they are reportedly effective in lowering abuse incidences and providing knowledge for coping in threatening environments. The purpose of the current study was to test the effectiveness of a school-based CSA prevention program (Safe-Touches) on Greek elementary school students (grades 1-3, N=272) and explore the effect of age and time of testing (academic term). There was a significant effect of age in the knowledge of Inappropriate Touch, when comparing pre and post-intervention assessments, with third graders showing greatest gains in knowledge, followed by second and first graders. Time of testing during the academic year also had a significant effect, as first graders tested later in the school year, scored higher on knowledge of Inappropriate Touch. The findings of the current study provide insight into the optimal timing to implement CSA prevention programs. Exposure to such programs and incorporation in the school curricula could largely benefit children of the Greek community in terms of safety and awareness.

Keywords : child sexual abuse, Safe-Touches, school-based prevention, schooling

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