Evaluation of a Sexual Abuse Prevention Program for Female Chinese Adolescents With Mild Mental Retardation

Yvonne Kit-shan Lee and Catherine So-kum Tang
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The effectiveness of the Behavioral Skills Training program in the primary prevention of sexual abuse for 72 female Chinese adolescents with mild mental retardation was evaluated. Subjects were assigned to either the Behavior Skills Training program or an attention control program. The Behavioral Skills Training group demonstrated greater knowledge regarding sexual abuse and self-protection skills at posttest, which was maintained at 2-month follow-up, though the scores on the recognition of inappropriate-touch requests showed a decreasing trend. They also exhibited less fear of objects, people, and situations after the prevention program. Booster sessions and a longer program duration should result in better retention. Results suggest that a modified Behavior Skill Training program can be effective with Chinese adolescents with mental retardation.

Over the past decades, clinicians have developed programs aimed at preventing sexual abuse (Kolko, 1988; Wurtele, 1990, 1993; Wurtele, Currier, Gillispie, & Franklin, 1991; Wurtele, Kast, Miller-Perrin, & Kondrick, 1989). According to Finkelhor's (1984) multidimensional theory of sexual abuse, the potential sexual abuse victim is one of the legitimate candidates for a primary preventive program in order to promote personal competency in resisting inappropriate or unwanted sexual advances.

Previous efforts at primary prevention of sexual abuse, however, have been specifically directed toward adults and children in the general population; individuals with mental retardation have been neglected. In fact, numerous empirical findings have highlighted the need for sexual abuse prevention programs targeting people with mental retardation. The reasons for this need include (a) the alarming incidence rate (Brown, Stein, & Turk, 1995; Turk & Brown, 1993), (b) the chronic nature of sexual victimization (Chamberlain, Rauh, Passer, McGrath, & Bucket, 1984; Sobsey, 1994), (c) the magnitude and range of the damaging psychological consequences (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Sobsey, 1994; Varley, 1984), as well as (d) the elevated vulnerability of people with mental retardation due to their limited sexual knowledge (Brantlinger, 1985; Edmonson, 1988), lifelong dependency on adults (O'Day, 1983), and impaired verbal ability (Sobsey, 1994).

To date, documentation of prevention programs designed to address competency enhancement of people with