APPENDIX G

The State of Evaluation in Youth Violence Prevention

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Youth Violence Prevention: The State of Evaluation
Presentation at National Technology Assessment Workshop
December 6, 2007
Baltimore, Maryland
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Purpose of the Presentation
• Brief overview of what we know about evaluating violence prevention programs for youth
• Primarily based on:
  - NIH State-of-the-Science Conference Statement
  - 2004

Topics:
- Why youth violence prevention is important
- How do we determine whether a program works?
- What do we know about effective programs?
- Challenges to determining effectiveness of some programs?
The Importance of Preventing Youth Violence

- Societal costs of youth violence:
  - educational opportunity loss
  - need for alternative schools and detention programs
  - demand on already stressed mental health, education and justice programs
  - impact of youth violence on victims, survivors, and families

Source: Thomas Insel, M.D., Director NIMH

YO Participants Mental Health

- Ever stayed overnight for mental health crisis: 70%
  - Most common were: Detention center (n = 67)
  - Hospital (n = 39)
- Ever received outpatient mental health services: 40%
  - Most receiving were: Professionals, like a psychologist, psychiatrist (n = 76)
  - Pediatrician, medical doctor or school counselor (n = 67)
- Ever received school-based mental health services: 27%
- Experiencing anxiety symptoms: 44%
- Experiencing depression symptoms: 7%

How to Measure Whether a Program Works

- Core idea: An evaluation studies what happens over time to people who get an intervention compared to those who don't.
- Requires comparison of equivalent groups who
  - do and don't get the program
  - before and after intervention period
- Requires focus on behavior change:
  - Reduction in engagement in violence
  - Decreased assault, armed robbery, rape and homicide
  - Many studies focus on precursors such as delinquency, physical aggression or antisocial behavior

Evidence is Stronger When:

- Individuals (schools) are randomly assigned to receive the intervention or the “placebo”
- All or nearly all study participants are followed throughout the study period
- Behavior is measured some time after the intervention—e.g., 12 months after
- When findings have been replicated

Why do we care about the strength of the evidence?

- Provides more assurance that if the program is replicated under similar circumstances, the results are likely to be the same