



An announcement from Acting Together, a CURA project researching the prevention of youth violence and gang-involvement

Gratitude, humility, and self-esteem linked to lower involvement in violence among youth, study finds

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For immediate release

SURREY, B.C. – A study of hundreds of local high school youth has linked gratitude, self-esteem, humility, authenticity, and parental monitoring to a lower level of violence.

The preliminary findings are from the Powerful Teen Study, one of several studies undertaken by the Surrey-based Acting Together SSHRC-CURA project involving Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey School district, and Simon Fraser University. Preliminary findings suggest that character strengths and connections with adults are related to lower risks for violence.

Dr. Roger Tweed said, “Schools and some youth programs already seek to build character strengths. These findings confirm the relevance of character strengths and suggest there may be value in additional efforts to build gratitude, humility, self-esteem, and authenticity.”

In youth ages 12 to 14, findings so far reveal that:

- Gratitude and authenticity (i.e., belief in being true to oneself) are associated among boys with lower rates of fighting and fewer beliefs justifying violence.
- Self-esteem and humility are both associated with fewer beliefs justifying violence.
- Youth can have both self-esteem (belief that oneself has value) and humility (belief that others are as important as oneself).
- Involvement in adult-directed leisure activities (arts, community groups organized by adults, religious activities, school clubs, and volunteer work) is associated with self-reported authenticity.
- Students who reported that their parents generally know where they are and who they are with, have both fewer delinquent beliefs and higher life satisfaction.
- Most students agreed that a teacher or other adult at school shows concern for them.
- Most students do not see many benefits to gang membership, but some are aware of only one or two of the many costs of gang membership.

With an extensive support from teachers and school administrators, over 400 eighth graders participated in the study by filling out confidential 22-page surveys that asked questions about their character strengths, social connections, and beliefs about crimes and gangs. The students were surveyed twice in the 2010-2011 school year, with a follow-up survey tentatively scheduled to take place in 2012-2013. Some parents and teachers were also surveyed.

These findings are preliminary and are based on data collected in the initial youth survey. As such, results are subject to change with further analysis including the later surveys. Results are also based on a selected subsample of students because some students chose not to participate. The study does not provide conclusive evidence of cause-and-effect factors for violence, but, rather, identifies associations that deserve further consideration within youth violence prevention efforts.

The Acting Together project is federally funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), through a \$1 million federal Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grant. As a CURA project, it is comprised of four post-secondary institutions, 12 community partners, and numerous prominent individuals.

To learn more about Acting Together, visit www.actingtogogether.ca.

For more information about Kwantlen, please visit kwantlen.ca

Media contacts:

Dr. Roger Tweed
Lead Researcher of the Powerful Teen Study
Acting Together SSHRC-CURA project
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
778 389 8864
roger.tweed@kwantlen.ca

Rob Rai
Assistant Manager: Safe Schools Department
Surrey School District #36
Cell# 778-772-4192
rai_r@sd36.bc.ca

Photo caption:

The privacy of students who participated in The Powerful Teen Study was ensured in part through the use of these cardboard desk covers, which were provided by AT staff and student assistants at the time the high school surveys were conducted.