

Rape Prevention and Education Program Creates Community and Systemic Change in California (2020-2021)

Background: The California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) Program is positively impacting sexual violence (SV) prevention among participants across the State of California. The RPE Program is a part of a national sexual violence prevention program funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDPH supports 24 grant-funded rape crisis centers throughout the state to conduct sexual violence prevention projects in their local communities using school-based and community mobilization approaches. As part of their RPE requirements, they collected quantitative and qualitative data from project participants. Two types of participant outcome data were collected by project facilitators from project participants: 1) pre- and post- surveys collecting quantitative data and 2) facilitated discussions providing qualitative data. Additionally, data on the how and what was done to implement these prevention projects was collected monthly from projects, as well as tracking of community-level impacts of the RPE projects (e.g., policy or protocol changes). **This brief report represents community outcome data from these 24 rape crisis centers during their second year of project implementation, from August 2020 to July 2021.**

Summary: CDPH RPE Program efforts aim to make change at the community and societal level, including changing policies, protocols, physical spaces, and community member discourse and action around sexual violence. From August 2020-July 2021, **nearly all organizations reported that community leaders had taken action toward preventing sexual violence.** These impacts were seen despite COVID-19- related implementation barriers. Community mobilization RPE projects reported especially strong progress toward community members taking initiative in SV prevention and fostering relationships with community partners, as well as making physical spaces safer.

Community Partnerships



56% of projects reported that their organization increased engagement of community partners in primary prevention work.

Youth as Partners

52%

of projects reported that their organization increased recruitment of youth as partners in primary prevention work.



School-based RPE projects, on the other hand, showed evidence of **strong community [1] interest in modifying or creating a new policy or protocol around sexual violence**, as well as community member engagement in preventing sexual violence.

[1] School-based projects defined “community” as the schools in which they conducted prevention, with students as “community members” and administrators/staff as “community leaders”

CDPH RPE Projects In Action

Sexual Violence Prevention Policy/Protocol Change

One of the CDPH RPE Program's focus areas is to engage schools and communities to adapt, develop, implement, or enforce policies or protocols related to sexual violence prevention.

Examples:

- Identifying SV prevention champion(s) with leverage in schools or the community to catalyze policy change
- Gathering existing school policies and analyzing for gaps or improvement needs in inclusivity and accessibility
- Creating or engaging an existing stakeholder committee or task force, sometimes including youth, to review new and revised policy/protocol
- Reaching out to city officials or presenting at a city council meeting to advocate for SV prevention policy- change



24%

of RPE projects reported changing a community/local policy around sexual violence prevention

Safety of Physical Spaces

RPE projects may engage community or school administration to assess and improve the physical areas on school campuses or in the greater community to improve physical or emotional safety.

Examples:

- Partnering with a community organization combating gang violence to make a park safer
- Blocking off neighborhood streets to allow safe space for community recreation
- Placing anti-drink drugging posters in bars
- Changing school's gender-neutral bathroom policy from requiring students to ask a teacher if they could use gender neutral bathroom
- Advocating to turn unused classrooms into safe spaces for gender/sexual minority youth and sexual violence resource centers



40%

of RPE projects reported that physical spaces in the community were made safer to reduce vulnerability to sexual violence

Community Leadership around SV Prevention

The CDPH RPE Program seeks to engage students, teachers, and school staff, and the greater community to act to prevent sexual violence.

Action By Community Leaders



84%

of projects reported that community leaders took action to reduce sexual violence.

Examples:

- Working with Title IX officer to make the SV reporting process more accessible to students and staff
- City-council member expressing support for community mobilization work after attending a virtual townhall meeting
- City mayor supporting a RPE project, later sharing publicly that she faced intense sexual harassment as a woman in politics
- City mayor attending quarterly Sexual Assault Primary Prevention Coalition Meeting
- Partnering with local businesses, mental health organizations, and law enforcement for SV prevention
- Connecting with grassroots organizations focused on racial justice to create SV awareness campaigns

“ I feel as though my opinions are represented through the work we do. I also feel as though the work we do is actively pushing towards change in my community... ”

RPE PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Internal Organization Change for SV Prevention

One of the CDPH RPE Program’s goals is to integrate primary prevention concepts into the implementing organization and prioritize sexual violence prevention along with providing services to victims/survivors.

Examples:

- Using extra time due to COVID lockdown to grow staff capacity and connectedness Reviewing/revising mission statements and restructuring departments
- Re-writing job descriptions to include a focus on primary prevention
- Creating new required staff trainings on conflict, microaggressions, and white privilege
- Creating an internal racial justice committee



48%

of RPE projects reported internal policy, procedure, protocol, or practice change that prioritized primary prevention

“ Since joining [RPE project] I have gained a deeper understanding of rape culture and of the factors, micro aggressions, and privilege within my own life that relate to and even perpetuate this toxic culture. ”

YOUTH RPE PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Conclusion

RPE projects reported making important changes in their communities and schools during the 2020-2021 period that impacted policies, protocols, community leaders, community member engagement, and physical spaces. Such changes cast a much wider net than individual-level changes; they change systems, structures, and social norms that shape how communities function and address the risk and protective factors for sexual violence.

