

# Attendance in the Strengthening Families Program in Washington and Oregon

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## The Strengthening Families Program

The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14 years (SFP) in the state of Washington and Oregon is a voluntary, family-based intervention, designed to discourage future substance abuse among adolescents and youth. This evidence-based educational program is delivered in local communities, bringing parents and their children together to learn healthy communication skills to effectively delay the onset of adolescent substance use

and other behavioral problems, and increase the resistance to peer pressure among youth. The program is delivered in seven two-hour sessions, and is conducted for groups of seven to twelve families usually over a seven-week period. Pre- and post-program self-assessments of risk and protective factors for substance abuse are administered by program facilitators in the first and last sessions. A higher value implies better family functioning. The instruments used

in the questionnaires are standard measures of child and adolescent risk and protective factors used in national and state risk surveillance surveys such as the annual Monitoring the Future survey supported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Comparing the pre- and post-program scores, while controlling for a variety of background variables, helps researchers determine the efficacy of the program in improving parental monitoring and parenting skills.

## Attendance Matters

In a program like the SFP, it is common to exclude individuals missing pre-scores, and then incompleteness is usually captured by the presence of missing responses in the final survey. However, survey

data could be missing either due to absence from the session when the surveys were conducted or due to non-response to the self-assessment survey items even when the individuals are in attendance. Un-

derstanding who decides to attend the program and who responds to the questionnaires is important in order to achieve a more realistic measure of the impact of the SFP on family functioning.

## Data from Washington and Oregon

A small number of program facilitators in 32 counties from the states of Washington and Oregon, between 2007 and 2009, voluntarily recorded attendance information in each of the seven sessions. Analyzing this smaller subset of data (n = 788) with attendance information improves our under-

standing of the drop-out mechanism. Using these data we find that pre- and post-program self-assessment scores were missing for approximately 26% and 40% of the participants, respectively, with both scores missing for 17% of the participants. Individuals who responded to the final survey

and those who attended the final session but did not respond to the survey were more likely to attend most of the seven sessions. On the other hand, individuals absent from the final session attended only about half of the sessions on an average.

Cross-tabulation of attendance in first and last sessions of the program (row %)					
	Post-program	Responded to survey	Did not respond to survey	Absent from session	Total
Pre-program					
Responded to survey		403 (69.2%)	66 (11.4%)	113 (19.4%)	582
Did not respond to survey		52 (30.2%)	94 (54.7%)	26 (15.1%)	172
Absent from session		18 (52.9%)	11 (32.4%)	5 (14.7%)	34
Total		473 (60.0%)	171 (21.7%)	144 (18.3%)	788

## Summary of Findings

First, focusing our attention to pre-program survey data, we find that pre-program scores were missing for 206 participants, out of whom 172 individuals attended session 1 but did not report their self-assessments scores, while only 34 individuals were not present in the first session. Statistical analysis shows that missing pre-program scores were more likely among individuals with lower self-assessment measures, and lower self-assessment scores or a related factor could possibly be the reason why they were unreported.

Second, the attendance data from the seven sessions show that attending a session increased the likelihood of attending the next session. The likelihood of attendance was lower for older participants. Program facilitators had noted the date of the sessions, and by merging weather information on those days, we find that at-

tendance was also lower on colder days. Programs that charged the participants and those that did not provide any transportation recorded higher attendance rates. It is likely that transportation were not provided by programs whose participants resided nearby, and were, thus, more likely to attend the sessions. Charging a fee for participation could induce fidelity. Finally, focusing our attention to post-program survey data, we find that programs which held an orientation session in addition to the seven regular sessions reported higher response rates. Individuals who chose to participate in the Spanish version of the program were less likely to report their self-assessment scores. Additionally, higher pre-program scores were associated with higher post-program scores and older participants had lower post-program scores. Those who were charged for par-

ticipating in the program reported higher post-program scores. Based on the three stages of the SFP – attendance, response in the final session, and the post-program score – we calculate the expected value of the post-program self-assessment scores for all participants. We had already noted that the non-respondents in session 1 were likely to have lower self-assessment scores. From our statistical analysis, we find that this trend is likely to persist. That is, the expected value of the post-program scores of the non-respondents is lower than the expected value of the post-program scores of the respondents to the final survey. Thus, by excluding session 1's non-respondents and absentees we are likely to underestimate the impact of the SFP on the session 7's respondents.

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