

programs have been rigorously evaluated to ensure that they actually do what they promise. One program that has been the target of rigorous evaluation is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program, which is a school-based gang and violence prevention program. This program is a cognitive-based program intended to (among other things) teach students about crime and its effects on victims, how to resolve conflicts without violence, and how to improve individual responsibility through goal setting. The G.R.E.A.T. program addresses multiple risk factors for violent offending among three domains: school, peer, and individual. Because it is curriculum-based in the school, it does not address risk factors present in the family or neighborhood. It is a 13-week program taught in sixth or seventh grade and attempts to affect several risk factors, including school commitment and performance, association with conventional or delinquent peers, empathy, and self-control, among others.

Finn-Aage Esbensen and his colleagues (Esbensen, Osgood, Peterson, Taylor, & Carson, 2013) evaluated the long-term effects of the G.R.E.A.T. program in seven cities across the United States. Schools selected for the program randomly assigned some seventh-grade classrooms to get the treatment (*experimental groups*) while the other classrooms did not (*control groups*). As you will later learn, this is called a *true experimental design*. It is an extremely strong research method for determining the effects of programs or policies because if groups are truly randomly assigned, there is a strong reason to believe that differences between the groups after program implementation, such as reduced violent offending, are because of the program and not some other factor that existed before the introduction of the treatment.

Both experimental and control group students in the Esbensen et al. (2013) study completed four follow-up surveys annually for four years. The researchers examined 33 outcome measures, including general delinquency, violent offending, gang affiliation, associations with delinquent peers, empathy, impulsivity, and problem solving. The statistical methods employed by Esbensen and his colleagues are very complicated and beyond the scope of this text, so we will simply highlight the general findings. When the data for all seven sites were combined, there were no differences in violent offending between experimental and control group students over the four-year period. Those students who participated in the G.R.E.A.T. program were, however, less likely to become members of gangs, had higher levels of altruism, showed less anger and risk taking, and had more favorable attitudes toward the police, among other things.

With these results, would you deem the G.R.E.A.T. program a success? These are the important questions evaluation research must address. Esbensen et al. (2013) agree that the program did not reduce general delinquency or violent offending but note that it was effective in reducing gang membership, which is also a risk factor for violent offending.

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