

Youth Preparedness in the United States: Assessing the Impact of the American Red Cross's "Prepare with Pedro!" Program

Children have long been regarded solely as victims and dependents in disaster situations. However, new research places children in a position of power to help their families prepare for and respond to disasters, particularly ones that are preventable, such as home fires. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the impact of the American Red Cross's "Prepare with Pedro!" youth disaster preparedness program on students' and their families' knowledge of and attitudes toward fire safety material. Using a storybook presentation, the program teaches children aged 5-8 how to practice fire drills with their families.

This thesis examines the impact the "Prepare with Pedro!" program had on students' overall knowledge, and topic-specific knowledge and attitudes through tests before and after the presentation. This thesis used an evaluation study methodology to examine the results of these tests for 12 classes in four U.S. states (California, New York, New Hampshire, and Maryland). The three classes in Maryland also participated in a 1-week post-presentation test and a survey that was sent to the students' families. The tests had five basic comprehension questions covering what the students learned about home fire preparedness and if they felt more prepared for a home fire after the presentation.

Home fires are the most prevalent and preventable disasters in the U.S. Preparedness actions, such as installing working smoke alarms, practicing a fire drill, and having a pre-determined meeting place, drastically lower the risk of dying during a home fire. It is notoriously difficult to teach adults disaster preparedness skills, but when their children bring home information from school, preparedness actions are more likely to be implemented. This makes programs such as "Prepare with Pedro!" key to improving fire preparedness in the home.

Overall, the results of this thesis show that students did significantly better answering questions after the presentation. The average total increase when comparing scores before and after the presentation was about 30 percent. All questions had higher scores after the presentation, and all but one were statistically significant (i.e. they were not the result of chance). Most students indicated that they felt more prepared for a home fire after the presentation. While results were limited, the family survey found that most households had discussed the material and done some preparedness activity at home, including testing their fire alarm, practicing a fire drill, or making an emergency plan. The American Red Cross's "Prepare with Pedro!" program had a generally positive impact on the students who participated and their households' knowledge of fire safety and attitudes toward feeling prepared for a home fire. However, further research, particularly longitudinal studies and work focused on improving the spread of knowledge to homes, is needed to expand knowledge on this topic.