Sexual health education interventions for young people: a methodological review


Authors' objectives
To locate reports of sexual health education interventions for young people, assess the methodological quality of evaluations, identify the subgroup with a methodologically-sound design, and assess the evidence with respect to the effectiveness of different approaches to promoting young people's sexual health.

Searching
Social Science Citation Index on BIDS, MEDLINE, PsycLIT, ERIC, Unicorn database (internal library management system), and the National HIV/AIDS Prevention Information Service database were searched from 1982 to 1994. The following journals were handsearched over the same years: Health Education Research, Health Education Journal, Health Education, AIDS Education and Prevention, Journal of School Health, and Family Planning Perspectives. The bibliographies of identified studies were examined, and researchers in the area were contacted for unpublished material.

Study selection
Study designs of evaluations included in the review
Controlled trials were included.

Specific interventions included in the review
Sexual health education/information.

Participants included in the review
Young people aged up to 19 years including high school students, university students, and runaway adolescents at a residential shelter.

Outcomes assessed in the review
The methodological quality of evaluations was assessed along with the study outcomes, which were changes in knowledge, attitudes or sexual behaviour.

How were decisions on the relevance of primary studies made?
The authors do not state how the papers were selected for the review, or how many of the authors performed the selection.

Assessment of study quality
The studies were rated on 8 methodological quality criteria: clear definition of aims; a description of the intervention package and design, sufficiently detailed to allow replication; inclusion of a randomly-allocated control group; provision of data on number of participants recruited to the study and control groups; provision of pre-intervention data for the study and control groups; provision of post-intervention data for the study and control groups; attrition rates reported for the study and control groups; and findings reported for each outcome measure, as described in the aims of the study.

Evidence on effectiveness was assessed for those studies meeting 4 core criteria: employing randomly-allocated control groups, or control groups shown to be equivalent to the study groups before intervention on sociodemographic characteristics and measures used as outcome variables; providing pre-intervention data; providing post-intervention data; and reporting on all outcomes. Two reviewers with backgrounds in quantitative social science independently assessed each study. Any disagreements were discussed and resolved with a third reviewer and the members of the study's steering group.

Data extraction
The authors do not state how the data were extracted for the review, or how many of the authors performed the data extraction.

Methods of synthesis
How were the studies combined?
The studies were combined by a narrative review.

How were differences between studies investigated?
The authors do not report how study differences were investigated.

Results of the review
Seventy-three outcome evaluations, of which only 12 were controlled trials and met the core quality criteria.

Of the 73 reports of sexual health interventions, which examined the effectiveness of these interventions in changing knowledge attitudes or behavioural outcomes, 65 were separate outcome evaluations. Of these 65 studies, 45 (69%) lacked random control groups, 44 (68%) failed to present pre-intervention data, 38 (59%) failed to present post-intervention data, and 26 (40%) omitted to discuss the relevance of loss of data caused by drop-outs. Only 12 (18%) of the 65 outcome evaluations were judged to be methodologically sound, and of these, only 3 were judged by the reviewers to be effective in showing an impact on young people's sexual behaviour.

Authors' conclusions
The design of evaluations in sexual health intervention needs to be improved, so that reliable evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches to promoting young people's sexual health may be generated.

CRD commentary
This review presents information about the methodology needed to evaluate health education interventions in order to judge their effectiveness.

Implications of the review for practice and research
Evaluations of sexual health interventions need to be improved in order to obtain reliable evidence about the effectiveness of different interventions.

Bibliographic details

PubMedID
7833754

Original Paper URL
http://www.bmj.com/content/310/6973/158

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by NLM

MeSH
Adolescent; Adult; Child; Female; Health Education; Health Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice; Humans; Male; Research Design; Risk-Taking; Sex Education; Sexual Behavior
Accession Number
11995000291

Date bibliographic record published
05/03/1995

Date abstract record published
05/03/1995

Record Status
This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.