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The Healthy School Ethos Pilot: Emerging Findings from A Structural Intervention to Prevent Substance Use

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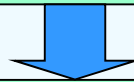
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Presentation outline

Young people and substance use: a public health priority



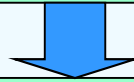
Existing interventions



Aims of the Healthy School Ethos project



Study design



Emerging findings

1. Young people and substance use: a public health priority

Young people and substance use: a public health priority

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graph TD; A[Young people and substance use: a public health priority] --> B[Existing interventions]; B --> C[Aims of the Healthy School Ethos project]; C --> D[Study design]; D --> E[Emerging findings];
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Existing interventions

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Emerging findings

Smoking reported by 15 year olds*

About **16% of boys** and
25% of girls aged 15 are
regular smokers

**Source: NatCen/NFER, 2006*

Drinking reported by 15 year olds*

Over **40%** of 15 year-olds **drink alcohol every week**

Average **weekly consumption** among these has **doubled** to **10.7 units** since 1990

**Source: Boreham & Blenkinsop, 2004*

Drug use reported by 15 year olds*

One-third of 15 year-olds
have taken drugs in the
last year

**Source: NatCen/NFER, 2006*

Reducing young people's substance use is a government priority

- **Every Child Matters** (DfES, 2004)
- **Choosing Health** (DH, 2004)
- **Drugs Strategy** (Home Office, 2002)

2. School-level determinants of substance use

Young people and substance use: a public health priority

Existing interventions

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Emerging findings

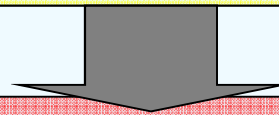
Existing school-based interventions

Classroom-based interventions aiming to improve knowledge, develop skills and modify peer norms are common in schools

Have not brought about major population wide benefits

Small, inconsistent and short-term effects*

Focus on the most 'proximal' determinants



These interventions are important and necessary but not sufficient on their own

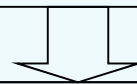
**Foxcroft et al, 2002; Faggiano et al, 2005; Thomas & Perera, 2006*

Existing whole-school interventions

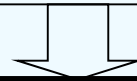
- USA - 'Aban Aya' project - 34% reduction in composite measure of substance use for intervention vs. comparison boys ($P < 0.05$) but not girls
- Australia - 'Gatehouse Project' - non-significant risk differences in cannabis, alcohol and tobacco use, but significant protective effect for subsequent cohorts at intervention c.f. comparison schools for composite risk measure

3. Aims of the Healthy School Ethos project

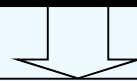
Young people and substance use: a public health priority



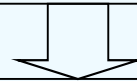
Existing interventions



Aims of the Healthy School Ethos project



Study design



Emerging findings

Study aims

- To pilot and assess the feasibility and acceptability of an intervention to prevent and/or reduce young people's use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco via promoting inclusive ethos in secondary schools in England.
- To pilot and assess the feasibility of undertaking a phase-III randomized controlled trial of the intervention, and examine preliminary outcomes.

Intervention: 'Core' components

Assessing and responding to needs

- (1) Needs-assessment surveys with students (in years 8/10)
- (2) Focus-groups with staff/students to determine priorities for intervention
- (3) Education consultant ensures work responds to measured needs

Increasing participation

- (4) School action group reviews school policies on bullying, substance misuse and teachers' written and verbal feedback on pupils' work
- (5) Increase pupil/parent involvement in other school decision-making bodies

Improving relationships

- (6) 10 hours' training for 20 teachers per school on enhancing teacher-pupil communication
- (7) Action group work with pupil representatives to develop and implement agreed rules for appropriate/inappropriate communication and conduct in classrooms
- (8) Review pastoral care
- (9) 6 assemblies and 3 other dedicated events aiming to develop positive ethos

Recognising achievement

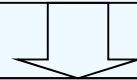
- (10) 3 events and 6 displays, plus media work, celebrating pupils' non-academic achievements.

Intervention: 'Responsive' components

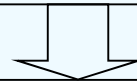
- Schools had flexibility to interpret core components but also responsive components
- Schools able to develop non-core components to ensure the intervention is responsive to local priorities
- As well as basic £4000, extra £5,000 available to implement these

4. The Healthy School Ethos intervention

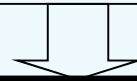
Young people and substance use: a public health priority



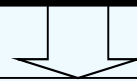
Existing interventions



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Study design



Study design: a 'mixed' methods evaluation

Pilot RCT methods

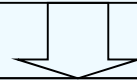
- **2 pairs of matched schools** (% free school meals; % BME; male: female ratio; health education; OFSTED 'rating')
- **Random allocation**
- **Baseline and Follow-up with Yr 7** (n=880)
- **Primary outcomes:** (1) smoking; (2) drunkenness; (3) drug use (all in the last month)
- **Other outcomes:** (1) attitudes and intentions relating to substance use; (2) attitudes to school

Process evaluation

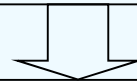
- Semi-structured interviews with students (n=15 per school), school staff (n=7 per-intervention school and 4 per-comparison schools) and educational consultants (n=3)
- Structured observations of classes (n=8 periods per school) and break-times (n=4)
- Unstructured observations of meetings, training and school context
- Audits of school policies

5. Study design: a 'mixed' methods evaluation

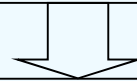
Young people and substance use: a public health priority



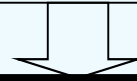
School-level determinants of substance use



Aims of the Healthy School Ethos project



The Healthy School Ethos intervention



Emerging findings

Fidelity

Fully implemented

- Needs-assessment surveys – informed action, wanted sub-group breakdowns
- Focus-groups with staff/students – not so used
- Education consultant guides schools – drive action, maintained focus on most disengaged

Fully implemented

- School action group meets x 10
- Group involves diverse staff, students – and did contribute especially in one school
- Action group work with pupil reps to revise and implement school rules – most salient activity, involved entire schools

Fidelity

Fully implemented

- Improve bullying policies – particularly in one school where charity facilitated work with students
- Improve reward schemes – particularly in one school where focus broadened from high-achievers to those improving

Fidelity

Partly implemented

- 10 hours' training for 20 teachers per school on enhancing teacher-pupil communication – observations limited
- Review pastoral care – not amended
- Events and displays
- Increase pupil/parent involvement in other school decision-making bodies – plans but no immediate action

Responsive components

- Improvements to physical environment – safe areas and student-edited e-boards
- Student mediators for playground – substantial activity in both schools with broad participation

Coverage

In intervention schools:

- 59% aware of HSE
- 67% aware of project to improve school
- 66% aware of students' re-writing rules

Acceptability

Very acceptable

- Facilitator with considerable education experience – scepticism overcome
- Balance between structure and local flexibility – but would welcome more focus on learning
- Student and staff participation – but broaden even further; participation at heart of the project

Acceptability

Mostly acceptable

- Action team does not need to meet so often
- Work needs longer to develop/bed down

Less acceptable

- Name confusing and brand not clear
- Manual not user-friendly
- Training not focused on practical skills

Potential causal pathways

Young people may have more reason to use substances when they:

- (1) feel disconnected from the main academic or other institutional markers of status and seek an alternative source of bonding and group identity through substance use;
- (2) adopt 'street' styles such as smoking cannabis because of the pressures to stay safe in and around school; and
- (3) use substances to manage their anxieties about school-work and escape unhappiness at school.

Potential causal pathways

Intervention needs to:

- (1) Enhance relationships, participation and engagement to provide all students with institutional markers of status and approval;
- (2) Ensure students are safe and protected by teachers; and
- (3) Provide students with social support to reduce their anxieties about school and school-work

Conclusion

Intervention feasible/acceptable in English schools

Lighter-touch intervention likely to be sustainable

Requires 2-4 years for substantial action

Need to ensure keep focus on most disengaged

Appropriate to embrace engagement in learning as well as social inclusion

Need for full trial to estimate health effects

Estimation of education effects probably as/more crucial to whether embraced by schools

References

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