

School-based sexual abuse prevention programmes strengthen children's protective behaviours and increase knowledge about sexual abuse



Disclosures of previous and current occurrences of child sexual abuse increase for participants of school-based education programmes

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effectiveness of school-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse. The review summarises findings from 24 trials, conducted in the U.S., Canada, China, Germany, Taiwan and Turkey. Six meta-analyses are included assessing evidence of moderate quality. This study is an update to a previous review and covers publications up to September 2014.

School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse – in the short term - can increase elementary students' knowledge of sexual abuse and behaviours protecting them against this type of abuse.

What did the review study?

Child sexual abuse is a significant global problem in both magnitude and its consequences. The most widely used primary prevention strategy has been the provision of school-based education programmes. Although programmes have been taught in schools since the 1980s, their effectiveness requires ongoing scrutiny.

This review assesses whether: programmes are effective in improving students' protective behaviours and knowledge about sexual abuse prevention; behaviours and skills are retained over time; and participation results in disclosures of sexual abuse, produces harms, or both.

Which studies are included in this review?

Only controlled studies - randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi RCTs - were included. Studies compared the school-based education programme with the standard school curriculum or no intervention.

What are the main results in this review?

Do school-based education programmes strengthen children's protective behaviours and knowledge about sexual abuse?

School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse are more effective than alternative programmes or no programme at all in strengthening children's knowledge about child sexual abuse prevention and their protective behaviours. Children retain the knowledge gained from programme participation, though no study has assessed retention over a period of longer than six months. No studies examined the retention of



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published until September 2014. This Campbell Systematic Review was published on 4 May 2015.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Bianca Albers (Centre for Evidence and Implementation) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2015:10 'School-based Education Programmes for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: A Systematic Review' by Kerryann Walsh, Karen Zwi, Susan Woolfenden, and Aron Shlonsky (DOI 10.4073/csr.2015.10). Copy-editing and layout was done by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



protective behaviours over time.

Disclosures of previous and current occurrences of child sexual abuse increase for participants of school-based education programmes. However, the evidence supporting this finding is weak and should be interpreted with caution.

Are there any adverse effects from school-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse?

School-based education programmes do not appear to cause fear or anxiety among child participants. Parental anxiety or fear was not measured in any of the studies.

What was the quality of the evidence?

The quality of the evidence of studies included in this review is moderate due to risk of bias detected for several studies, imprecise data reporting and – for studies using a cluster-randomised design – the use of inappropriate data analysis approaches.

What do the findings in this review mean?

School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse are a valid approach to strengthen the knowledge about child sexual abuse, and the protective behaviours of children in primary schools. The review did not assess whether these programs actually prevent child sexual abuse.

Further research is needed to more rigorously evaluate existing programmes, their content, methods, and delivery, including the use of web-based or online programmes. This research should also explore the potential relation between program participation and actual prevention of child sexual abuse.