



Brief Consultation Supports Interventions

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Drug and alcohol use, pregnancy, and HIV are public health problems for high school youth in South Africa. People have created programs that work well to address these problems in schools. However, it can be hard for teachers to use these programs because they have little time, and their schools have few resources.



Figure 1 Photograph by Sharefaith on Pexels. CCO

This study focused on how to better support teachers in low-resourced areas to deliver a program called HealthWise. This study shows how brief consultations can help teachers use these programs which can help make risky activities less likely.

“Consultation support that is abridged or a lower dose than is typical can be feasible in such a low-resourced, overburdened setting. Further, such abridged consultation was associated with greater EBP [evidence-based programs] coverage, student interest and adaptation. However, contextual factors should be considered to match teachers/schools to the implementation support that may best suit them as some of these findings were moderated.”

Highlights

Teachers receiving brief consultations taught more content than those who did not receive consultations.

Consultation support to deliver a school-based program may need to be tailored and made briefer than is typical to fit different school contexts.

Methods

Teachers from high schools around Cape Town, South Africa, got brief consultations to help them deliver a program to stop youth from using drugs and having risky sex. In the study, half of the teachers received brief consultations (e.g., 3 meetings with a program consultant, text messages, and plans for lessons) from the research team. This included three 5 to 30 minute consultations, text message reminders, curriculum plans, and prepared program materials. The study compared the program delivery of 33 teachers who got consultations to 41 teachers that did not get consultations.

We planned for the teachers to receive more consultations, but that was difficult to do because of time, resources, safety, and school leadership support.

Results

- Consultation helps teachers use the program even when the consultation is brief, especially for teachers who do not have a graduate degree and those in high-risk schools.
- Brief consultation is linked to teachers covering more program content.
- In settings with fewer resources, brief consultation may be more realistic than frequent consultation.
- With the help of the consultant, teachers who taught in areas that were poorer and located in less safe areas than other teachers adapted the program more than the others to deal with the additional risk factors they faced.
- Higher risk schools may benefit more from brief consultation than lower risk schools.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Our study showed it was key to pay attention to community factors. For example, we had to change the consultation because the first study design did not work for our community. We did this because teachers had little time and resources and may have had negative views of the South African life skills program, in which HealthWise was taught. By making the consultation brief, more teachers took part in it. We also had to pay attention to how unsafe and poor these schools and communities were. The consultant helped teachers change how they used the program in a way that it was helpful and would overcome barriers related to safety, not having resources, and the things they had to do to teach the life skills class.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: We need to make consultation brief to work with the little time and resources teachers have in poorer communities.

Practice: When you cannot offer consultation to everyone, start with giving the consultation to higher risk schools or teachers without a graduate degree. When teachers do not have time or are not open to take part in a consultation program, you could make the consultation briefer and still help teachers deliver more of the program.

Social Action: Often, schools had poor views of the South African life skills program, called Life Orientation. School and government groups need to think about how to give more resources and change people's views about Life Orientation. This will help schools overcome these barriers to using programs via Life Orientation.

Similar Settings: People working in similar places must be ready to change the way they work to provide support in a realistic way that overcomes the barriers of working in a place with low resources. For example, they may need to make the services briefer.

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