Bristol Girls Dance Project: a cluster randomised controlled trial of an after-school dance programme to increase physical activity among 11- to 12-year-old girls

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Plain English summary

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As children get older they tend to do less physical activity (PA). This is more the case for girls than for boys. It is important to increase PA in adolescent girls because participation in regular PA is linked to a lower risk of heart problems, diabetes and obesity in adulthood.

Girls find dance enjoyable, so providing dance classes could be a way to increase PA. In this study we used a randomised controlled trial to test this idea. A total of 571 Year 7 girls from 18 schools took part. Nine schools received up to 40 after-school dance sessions (two sessions per week for 20 weeks). We collected data from the girls three times to test whether or not the sessions affected their PA or attitudes towards being active.

When attending dance sessions, girls did increase their activity slightly, but this had no impact on their overall activity levels. Only one-third of those girls who signed up to the study regularly attended the sessions. However, the reasons given for not attending did not appear to relate to disliking the sessions. Many of the girls who attended told us that they enjoyed the dance sessions, that they developed a number of social and dance skills and that they made new friends. However, there was no measurable evidence for this. Although we provided the sessions for free, we estimate that it would cost £1.57 per girl to attend a session.
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