

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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Declared competing interests of authors: Professor Jago has been a member of the Research Funding Board for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Public Health Research (PHR) board since October 2014. Professor Powell was a member of the NIHR PHR Funding Board from June 2011 to September 2015.

Published May 2016

DOI: 10.3310/phr04060

Plain English summary

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Public Health Research 2016; Vol. 4: No. 6

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Plain English summary

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.

Public Health Research

ISSN 2050-4381 (Print)

ISSN 2050-439X (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 11/3050/01. The contractual start date was in April 2013. The final report began editorial review in July 2015 and was accepted for publication in December 2015. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health.

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