

A peer-led physical activity intervention in schools for adolescent girls: a feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Few adolescent girls are active enough to keep healthy and many face barriers to being active. The Peer-Led physical Activity iNtervention for Adolescent girls (PLAN-A) is a programme to increase girls' activity levels through their friendship groups. Influential Year 8 girls (aged 12–13 years), nominated by other girls in their year, are trained to be peer supporters (PSs) and to encourage their friends to be active. The study wanted to test whether or not PLAN-A was acceptable to Year 8 girls, whether or not it had the potential to increase their physical activity, how much it cost and whether or not the research to test if it works was possible. The study developed the intervention with the help of Year 8 girls and tested it in one school with 70 girls. The study recruited six secondary schools in south-west England: four schools (with 269 girls) ran PLAN-A and two (comparison) schools (with 158 girls) did not. All Year 8 girls wore an activity monitor and answered survey questions about their attitudes to being active. The study calculated the cost of running PLAN-A and talked with the PSs, other Year 8s, parents and PS trainers to identify what worked and what needed improvement.

Ninety-five per cent of all eligible Year 8 girls took part. In total, 55 girls were nominated and agreed to be PSs and attendance at the training was high (attendance rate 90–100%). Five female PS trainers with experience in youth work, drama and/or health promotion were trained. PSs felt privileged to be nominated, enjoyed the training, learnt about girls' activities, how to support their friends and formed a strong rapport with the trainers. The majority of participants completed the questionnaires and wore the activity monitor. Analysis showed that PLAN-A could increase girls' moderate to vigorous activity by 6 minutes per day compared with the comparison schools. The average cost of running PLAN-A was £2685 per school or £37 per Year 8 girl.

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