

Interventions integrating health and academic education in schools to prevent substance misuse and violence: a systematic review

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Plain English summary

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Interventions that teach school students academic knowledge and skills alongside health knowledge and skills can aim to reduce student substance use and/or violence. They aim to equip young people with the skills and knowledge required to develop good relationships with teachers, parents and peers, and reduce risk-taking alongside the development of academic skills and knowledge. The authors of this report reviewed existing research on such interventions, exploring how they are expected to work, what factors affect their implementation and how they have an impact on substance use and violence. We defined what sort of evidence would be included in the review, carried out a comprehensive search and found 68 reports on interventions of interest, 41 of which provided evidence of effectiveness, most of them from the USA.

The review of theory about how such interventions are meant to work suggested that they aim to not only build links between health and academic learning but also build links between students and teachers within and beyond the classroom, as well as between students and their peers and parents. These links are supported through the development of students' social and emotional skills.

The review of factors affecting the delivery of integrated curricula emphasises the role of teachers, who need to have belief in the programmes, as well as enough time, resources and the capacity to deliver them. Furthermore, support from school administrators was very important.

The pooling of results from different studies of the effectiveness of integrated curricula suggest that these interventions may reduce substance use, particularly when they are implemented over longer periods of time. There is little evidence to suggest that they can reduce violence. There is inconclusive evidence around their ability to improve academic outcomes.

Currently, there is some evidence to support the implementation of integrated academic and health curricula for reduced substance use, but more needs to be learned about how these interventions work.

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