

Peer-led physical activity intervention for girls aged 13 to 14 years: PLAN-A cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

PLAN-A cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

Few adolescent girls meet government physical activity recommendations, and physical activity levels decrease with age, which can lead to poor health. The Peer-Led physical Activity iNtervention for Adolescent girls (PLAN-A) aimed to empower influential Year 9 girls with the knowledge and skills to encourage their friends to be more physically active. These influential girls, nominated by other girls in the year, were called peer supporters. This trial explored whether or not Year 9 girls in the 10 schools that received PLAN-A became more physically active than those in the 10 schools that did not.

In total, 1558 Year 9 girls from 20 schools in south-west England participated. Girls in all schools wore an activity monitor for 7 days and completed questionnaires about their quality of life and feelings about physical activity. The baseline measures for all schools were collected during the winter of Year 9. Ten schools were then selected by chance to receive the intervention. Seven freelance female trainers were trained to deliver peer supporter training sessions to the nominated peer supporters (an average of 16 girls per school) in the intervention schools. These sessions promoted confidence, developed communication skills and provided the girls with strategies for encouraging their peers to be physically active in subtle ways. Peer supporters were then encouraged to promote physical activity among their friends for a 10-week period in the summer of Year 9. At 1 year after baseline measurements, physical activity and self-esteem measurement were repeated and differences between the groups analysed.

The cost of delivering PLAN-A was recorded to determine whether or not PLAN-A was cost-effective. The research team also spoke to Year 9 girls, school staff and trainers to explore their experiences of the intervention and identify factors that may have affected how the intervention worked.

There was no evidence that PLAN-A increased physical activity levels in participating girls. PLAN-A was shown to cost £2817 per school to deliver, on average, or £31 per Year 9 girl, and was, therefore, not cost-effective.

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