



Changing adolescent health behaviours: Empirical evidence and practical ways forward

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- on behalf of the I.Family consortium -





- Adolescents are targets for health behaviour change interventions.
- In the past, interventions have focused on particular health problems, for example obesity, or on achieving particular health-related behaviours.
- There are reasons for this:
 - Evidence that good diet/regular exercise has health benefits
 - Concern over levels of obesity
 - Practical reasons for focussing on physical health outcomes
- However, there are reasons for exploring alternative strategies.

Three reasons why interventions should focus less on specific health behaviour outcomes.

- Lack of convincing evidence for methodological reasons.
- Danger of putting too much emphasis on individual responsibility.
 - Accountability
 - Having the authority to act
- Challenges due to characteristics of adolescence.



Where does health 'fit' in adolescence?

- Adolescence is a dynamic system.
- Concern for future health tends not to weigh heavily in adolescent decisions.
 - Future health benefits are invisible
 - Future health is not a priority
 - Healthy behaviours are not 'sexy'
- Ecological approach enhances our understanding of adolescence and the challenges faced by intervention designers.
- But, we should be cautious about approaching intervention *design* from an ecological perspective.





What is the alternative?

- Stable and positive changes
 - Increasing media and consumer literacy
 - Reflexive attitudes
 - Personal and social skills
- Possible aims?
 - More reflective decision-making
 - Boosting self-esteem
 - Focus on capabilities
- From making 'good choices' to making choices well
 - Consideration of what matters to a person
 - Effective processes of choosing
 - Towards empowerment



Practical ways forward?

- Existing programmes are beginning to explore these possibilities.
 - Positive Youth Development programmes (PYD)
 - WHO Health Promoting Schools Framework
- Signs of success
 - Improved self-perceptions
 - Increased self-esteem
 - Potential of far-reaching effects
- Challenges
 - Face many of the same methodological challenges as behaviour change interventions.
 - Incompatible with established framework of evaluation



Practical ways forward?

- Thoughts for the future...
 - Rethinking outcomes
 - Rethinking evidence
 - Rethinking effectiveness





Thank you!

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I should stress that the views presented here are my own

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