



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Rapid review of evidence on safeguarding to inform the healthy child programme 5 to 19

Background

This is a summary of the full rapid review which was researched and written by Dartington Social Research Unit, commissioned by Public Health England.

An Executive Summary, the full report and appendices can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-child-programme-rapid-review-on-safeguarding

Purpose of the review

- The Healthy Child Programme (2009) sets out the recommended framework of universal and progressive services for children and young people in England to promote their optimal health and wellbeing.
- The purpose of the Rapid Review is to update the evidence in relation to safeguarding guidance.
- In line with the remit of the Healthy Child Programme, the focus was on prevention and early intervention.

Scope of the review

The review looks at relevant systematic review level evidence, supplemented with some primary impact evaluations, about 'what works' in the areas of preventing or intervening early with:

child abuse
and neglect

child sexual
abuse and
exploitation

intimate
partner
violence (IPV)

female genital
mutilation
(FGM)

gang violence

Preventing child abuse and neglect

- The evidence for universal campaigns with a population-level mass media component designed to prevent child physical abuse is mixed.
- There is evidence that parenting programmes can be successful in preventing child maltreatment, although evidence is stronger for their impact on reducing relevant risk factors and strengthening protective factors.
- Targeted family-focused interventions are effective in improving different aspects of family functioning that are related to child abuse and neglect.

Preventing child abuse and neglect

- The limited evidence available suggests that universal school-based interventions to reduce cyber-abuse are ineffective in increasing children's online protective behaviours but have some positive effects on internet safety knowledge and attitudes.
- Implementers of interventions to prevent child abuse and neglect need to have appropriate training and support, particularly if the content lies outside their usual range of expertise and experience (which is not uncommon).
- There is need for further intervention development in a range of areas (for example neglect, parents' mental health, the role of fathers) and more rigorous evaluation of intervention effectiveness.

Preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation

- The review did not identify any relevant studies (that is, meeting the inclusion criteria) focusing explicitly on preventing child sexual exploitation.
- There is reasonably strong evidence for the effectiveness of school-based sexual abuse prevention programmes in improving children's protective behaviours, perceived self-protection skills and knowledge about sexual abuse and how to be safe.
- The evidence for whether or not school-based programmes succeed in reducing actual sexual abuse is lacking (partly because it is hard to measure), so the further development of such programmes should be accompanied by rigorous evaluation.

Preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation

- There is a small amount of evidence for the effectiveness of interventions seeking to raise adults' awareness of child sexual abuse and helping them to recognise and respond to it.
- It is acknowledged that child sexual abuse will only be eradicated if it is confronted on multiple levels: child, family, community and society.

Preventing intimate partner violence

- There is reasonably strong evidence (albeit mainly from North America) for the effectiveness of school-based dating violence interventions in improving young people's attitudes and knowledge around dating violence, with interventions that adopt a more comprehensive approach appearing to be more effective.
- Programme-level responses need to be complemented by policies that promote greater gender equality and by community action to challenge norms that condone gender-based violence, and there is also a case for intervening with pre-adolescents.

Preventing intimate partner violence

- There is evidence that dating violence prevention interventions delivered in the community can be effective in reducing victimisation and/or perpetration.
- Media campaigns may be useful in raising awareness of IPV and services to address it, but their limited reach can be a potential barrier to their effectiveness

Preventing female genital mutilation

- No studies were found that meet the inclusion criteria for this review but 2 systematic reviews of studies conducted in African countries with a high prevalence of FGM were identified and included with a health warning about their quality and transferability.
- These reviews provide some evidence of the effectiveness of various interventions in changing participants' beliefs, knowledge and intentions regarding FGM but, where measured, no evidence that these changes translate into reduced prevalence of the practice among young girls.

Gang involvement and gang violence

- There is a lack of rigorous evaluation of the impact of interventions aiming to prevent gang membership and subsequent gang violence, especially in the UK
- Universal, mostly school-based, gang prevention interventions have been found to produce some positive effects (for example on attitudes to gangs and the police) but generally show limited effectiveness (for example on initiation of gang membership, delinquency and crime rates)
- Community-based interventions for at-risk young people have been found to reduce some risk factors for gang membership, but on the whole they do not have significant effects on gang membership, arrests or drug use

Gang involvement and gang violence

- There is an absence of evidence for the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural and opportunities provision approaches to preventing gang involvement.
- Preventing gang involvement and gang-related violence is likely to involve seeking to meet children's developmental needs from early childhood onwards, and acting in the individual, family, school, peer and neighbourhood domains to address risk factors.
- Factors considered likely to increase the effectiveness of interventions include a personalised approach, community involvement in planning and delivery and sharing expertise between agencies.

Economic analysis

- Child abuse and neglect can be linked to a wide range of longer-term adverse outcomes, covering areas such as employment, years of education, mental health problems and substance use.
- When interventions are effective in reducing child abuse and neglect, the monetary benefits reflect improvements in outcomes across the child's life.
- Investing in programmes that are proven to prevent or reduce child abuse or neglect will likely lead to a positive return on investment across many sectors.

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