

Short-term evaluation of the Zero Tolerance Respect package in Midlothian primary schools, a randomized controlled trial.

Researchers

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Aims

Few educational interventions are evaluated by randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as is the norm in medicine. The NHS funded Healthy Respect (HR) in Lothian to provide a model of best practice to improve young people's sexual health including sexual health and relationships education in schools. Research suggests that starting such education at primary schools may be beneficial. The HR team identified a package, Zero Tolerance Respect (ZTR), to introduce in primary schools (P7 age 10-12 years). It aims to teach children to avoid violence and respect differences. It does not address sexual issues directly, but the HR team developed some homework tasks for pupils and parents, some of which related to sexual health.

The investigators in this research were part of a team evaluating HR for the NHS. They worked with HR to evaluate ZTR by an RCT where 30 schools (952 pupils) were randomized to ZTR or control status.

The aims of the RCT were

- 1 To compare pupils in ZTR and control schools on a) understanding of the idea of 'respect' b) attitudes to gender stereo-typing c) the acceptability of disrespectful behaviour and d) attitudes to racial discrimination?
- 2 To investigate pupils' and teachers' views of ZTR and to determine if any similar initiatives were taking place in control schools. (*we found none*)
- 3 To relate attitudes to respect to the types of films watched by pupils.

Project Outline/Methodology

A small team of researchers visited each ZTR school before and after the package was taught. Control schools were visited at comparable times.

We asked the pupils about their attitudes to 'respect' including the acceptability of violent behaviour and discrimination and calculated a 'respect score' from their answers. After ZTR we carried out activities to find out what the pupils understood by respect, to investigate attitudes to racial discrimination and to gauge the extent that pupils stereotyped occupations by gender.

Key Results

Pupils reported high levels of respectful behaviour, but boys less so than girls. After ZTR boys respect scores increased, more for those with low scores at baseline, but those for girls were unchanged. Pupils saw respect as consisting of good manners and following formal rules as well as avoiding bullying. They made little mention of equality and the absence of discrimination despite their being part of the ZTR package. Pupils were much more aware of the unacceptability of racial discrimination than had been found in similar research in Scotland 15 years ago. Stereotyping of occupations by gender was very marked in both intervention and control schools. Both teachers and pupils were very positive about ZTR. The uptake of the homework element was patchy with only one school using the sexual health tasks. When they were used, with feedback to the class, teachers valued them highly.

Over 55% of boys and over 25% of girls reported one or more film with a 15/18 certificate among their favourite films. Pupils who reported such viewing had considerably lower respect scores.

Conclusions

ZTR has had a short term effect in improving boys' self-reports of respectful attitudes, but there was no evidence of its influence on girls. We were not able to show that it influenced gender stereotyping of occupations. Racial discrimination was not evident in either ZTR or control schools.

What does this study add to the field?

It informs teachers and policy makers about what they can expect from ZTR.

Implications for Practice or Policy

Since programs like ZTR affect boys and girls differently separate school provision may be appropriate.

Where to next?

We may be able to follow these pupils into secondary school to evaluate the longer term of ZTR.

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