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Research on school-based interventions needs more input from teachers

Helping our young people develop skills that enable them to negotiate their way through life's challenges, successfully and safely, may be the most valuable gift that parents, carers and educators can give. Learning how to make the most of opportunities, cope with difficulties, and manage risk in healthy ways, can have a substantial impact on wellbeing in the short and long-term. Schools are one environment where young people learn about how to care for themselves and others. Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education plays a key role in this, as part of a broader curriculum of formal and informal learning,

As psychologists who aim to develop effective alcohol education measures, any programme of research has to begin with engaging our target population and relevant stakeholders. There are a number of studies reporting on adolescents' views about such topics as alcohol and drugs. For example we have conducted studies to find out what young people want to know about alcohol, highlighting peer influences in unplanned drinking occasions (Davies, Martin, and Foxcroft, 2013).

However, despite teachers and other educators being major stakeholders in the delivery of PSHE, there is a lack of academic research exploring their views on the subject. Consequently, many new programmes are developed for use in schools without input from teachers, and may not take into account what they consider appropriate for the young people that they teach. For psychologists who want to support the effective delivery of PSHE in schools, the critical role of teachers cannot be emphasised enough, and those who educate our young people have to be a first port of call for anyone conducting research in this area.

Unfortunately, the non-statutory status of PSHE can mean there is often wide variation in how and what young people learn about key topics such as alcohol use and misuse. Indeed a recent Ofsted report concluded that PSHE is 'not yet good enough' in 40% of schools (Ofsted, 2013), and systematic reviews conclude that there is a lack of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness for current measures (Foxcroft and Tsertsvadze, 2011; Mason-Jones *et al.*, 2016). It is therefore essential that any new PSHE initiatives are evidenced based, and include insight from those who are striving to deliver programmes to large numbers of young people in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Teachers' views

Given the important role of teachers, it is somewhat surprising that there are only a small number of published studies exploring their views on PSHE topics, or about the development and acceptability of new interventions. In one study conducted by the PSHE Association and Mentor-ADEPIS (Boddington, McWhirter, and Stonehouse, 2013), views on drug and alcohol education were explored with 288 teachers. The results revealed that constraints in terms of time, resource and expertise were felt to have an influence on the quality and effectiveness of delivery of PSHE education. Furthermore, it highlighted that teachers are reliant on a range of resources, such as the 'Talk to Frank' website, for which there is no evidence of effectiveness in reducing risky drinking or drug taking among young people (Boddington *et al.*, 2013). Clearly, there is a need for a more substantial body of evidence in the development and evaluation of resources made available to those delivering PSHE education.

A start has been made in addressing the imbalance in research evidence supporting the development of new initiatives. In 2015, nine PSHE teachers were interviewed as part of a qualitative study concerning views on alcohol education. Analysis of interview transcripts identified three main themes regarding teachers' views on 'the importance of PSHE'; 'drinking responsibly'; and 'young people under pressure' (Davies, 2016).

Themes

The theme 'the importance of PSHE' reflected a feeling, among teachers participating in this study, that PSHE has a critical role in education. Three sub-themes related to this were 'preparing adolescents for the real world'; 'challenges in delivering PSHE' and 'PSHE facilitation'. The teachers were sensitive to the need for high quality PSHE education as part of a fully rounded education, which would adequately prepare their students not only for the world of work, but also for challenges found in all aspects of modern life. Despite the passion exhibited by these teachers, there was also evidence of some frustration with the way in which the topic was delivered. Time pressures were felt to play a part but also this may reflect a lack of priority within the curriculum. Opinions were mixed about using outside speakers or groups to deliver PSHE topics, with both benefits and limitations recognised by teachers.

The theme 'drinking responsibly' encapsulated the teachers' apparent acceptance of drinking during adolescence, and their subsequent hope to impart a sensible approach to alcohol consumption to their students. There appeared to be two aspects to responsible drinking reflected in two sub themes; 'units and quantity' and 'making decisions'. The first was related to knowledge about units of alcohol and what would be an appropriate quantity to consume. The second aspect concerned how to encourage adolescents to make 'good' decisions about alcohol.

The final theme, 'young people under pressure', described teachers' concerns about the myriad of difficulties facing the young people. Within this, several sub themes were identified, including 'social groups and pressure' and 'drinking and culture'. These findings highlighted the ways that teachers tried to understand the broader social

pressure their students faced, as well as the challenges of navigating giving good advice about alcohol given its huge influence within wider society.

New survey

Building on this novel insight into teachers' views of alcohol education, we set out to explore key themes, for alcohol use and other PSHE topics, with a larger sample of teachers. A new online survey was launched in spring 2017, with the purpose of widening the exploration of teachers' views on the current provision of PSHE education. This research aims to gather information on what teachers think about the education of adolescents concerning not only alcohol and drug use, but also covering topics such as sex and relationships, and mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the study aims to gauge the acceptability and feasibility of using digital tools within the classroom environment when teaching young people about these topics.

The benefits of the previous small-scale qualitative study are the exceptionally rich and detailed findings, insights from which have informed the development of the online questionnaire. Results from the new survey will be able to reflect views from a much wider and diverse sample though, and will allow researchers to analyse data that better represents teachers' views from across the UK. Additionally, the use of online research provides an ideal platform to explore a broader scope of topics such as sex and relationships, mental health and wellbeing, and modes of delivery, as well as alcohol and drug use.

If our society is to address the many and varied issues facing young people today, health initiatives need to be informed by more and better research. This cannot be done without the input of major stakeholders in education, such as teachers, who are invited to contribute their views via our current study. This short online survey is open to any teachers, in any school, with responsibility for, or an interest in, PSHE education. The questionnaire takes around 20 minutes to complete and, as a thank you for taking part, individual participants will have the opportunity to enter a prize draw to win one of three £100 shopping vouchers. Winners of the prize draw will take notified by end October 2017.

Detailed information about the survey and how

to participate can be found at:

<https://tinyurl.com/PSHE-Teachers>

Updates and a summary of our findings will be also published on our website, during and at the end of the study:

<http://psych.brookes.ac.uk/research/pshe.php>

If you have any questions about participation, or you would like to be involved with future collaborations on this important topic please email Dr Emma Davies (edavies@brookes.ac.uk) or call 01865 484056.

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Education and Health Archive

Each issue of the journal, published since 1983, is available via the archive. There are several simple indices that help to identify articles by keywords; year/issue number; author surname and article title. It can be seen that some contributors have had a number of articles published and there are a range of topics that have been covered over the years. Sometimes a contributor will update their article or develop points raised by another contributor. The pages on the website, that have been provided for the Education and Health journal, usually have the highest number of 'reads' across all pages on this Internet site.

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"The (SHEU survey) helped us to prioritise where we needed to be in terms of PSHE education. We delivered assemblies based on the evidence as well as curriculum development, and dealt with whole school issues – particularly in regard to pastoral care. The answers received to the question on the survey Who are you most likely to approach if you needed help worried staff as teacher was not a popular answer. Subsequently the staff asked themselves why this had happened and what needed to be done to address the issue. There was more emphasis on wider aspects of PSHE education delivery, which needed more attention. To summarise, the (SHEU survey) allows the PSHE department to assess the impact of teaching and learning and modify future lessons accordingly. It allows our school to look at whole school issues such as the extent to which the pastoral care system is meeting the needs of our pupils. It helps us to do need analysis of our pupils. It helps to provide important evidence for SEF / the extent to which we are meeting wellbeing indicators / National Healthy School standards." Secondary School Head

For more details please visit <http://sheu.org.uk>