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Getting the evidence into practice and policy to improve young people's health: Some barriers and facilitators

This abstract is taken from a forthcoming article about the role of evidence in youth health policy and practice and examines some of the challenges researchers face in getting research findings into the arena.

Seldom straightforward

There is a growing awareness of the role research plays in informing policy and practice. An increasing requirement for accountability, performance management issues and more scrutiny of public interventions has led to more demand for evidence to inform action. Evidence based policy and practice has gained momentum particularly in health improvement and in education. There are potentially differing expectations and cultures of stakeholders involved in this process, which can mean that the translation of findings into policy and practice is seldom straightforward.

Challenges

The article considers the contribution evidence has to make, accentuating its place

throughout the policy and practice cycle. From appraising what interventions and mechanisms are most likely to work with young people, through to learning lessons and assessing transferability. Rather than just focusing on the viewpoint of researchers, the discussion illustrates that there are challenges for policy-makers and practitioners too. For example, issues around the timing of research and the competing influences that exist for policy-makers and practitioners.

Youth health

In order to highlight some of these facilitators the article examines a recent initiative to promote dialogue between key agencies involved in youth health in Scotland. "Linking Policy, Practice and Research: This research and information initiative on young people and health in Scotland" encouraged close collaboration between NHS Health Scotland, University of Edinburgh research centres, policy-makers and practitioners working in the area of youth health and well-being.

The aim of this initiative was to develop

an interface mechanism whereby research-practice-policy dialogue was built into strategy development.

Four related key facilitators

By outlining the key issues which emerged during this research and information initiative and considering the outcomes, it is proposed that there are four related key facilitators, collaboration, communication, mutual exchange and effective dissemination of research findings. Therein, some of the main issues in involving young people themselves in the evidence process are considered.

Contributing evidence

The article concludes that contributing evidence to improving young people's health will continue to be challenging but the contribution is substantial and can be aided by recognising a 'pluralistic' culture, a more multi-stakeholder approach and through promoting learning and improvement. Evidence is most likely to influence policymakers and practitioners through an extended process of communication.