Author’s response to reviews

Title: Systematic Review of Effectiveness of School-Based Sexual Health Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Authors:

Virginia A Paul-Ebhoimhen (amen_virginia@yahoo.co.uk)
Amudha Poobalan (a.poobalan@abdn.ac.uk)
Edwin R. van Teijlingen (van.teijlingen@abdn.ac.uk)

Version: 5 Date: 29 November 2007

Author’s response to reviews:

29th November 2007

Erik Alexandersson
Assistant Editor

Response to editor: Systematic review of effectiveness of school-based sexual health interventions in sub-Saharan Africa.

MS: 1844005017128350

Dear Erik,

Thank you very much for accepting our paper in principle for BMC Public Health, and for giving us the chance to make a few more ‘minor essential improvements’, as suggested by the two referees. We have outlined below point-by-point the changes we have made to the final manuscript submitted today.

Reviewer I (Nicole Crepaz)
1. The word ‘published’, now added in the Abstract as suggested.

2. On page 5 rationale is now provided why cross-sectional studies were excluded. The full sentence on page 5 now reads:

‘To be included for review, studies had to have had an appropriate control group, with participants at post intervention assessment having also been assessed at baseline to increase objectivity in attributing effect(s) of interventions to the original baseline sample, and to increase validity of measured attrition rates.’

3. On page 6 the confusion around the level of randomisation regarding the paper by Rusakaniko et al. has now been clarified. Going back to the original paper students appear to have been randomised at individual level. Hence the sentence on page 6 now reads:
¿Rusakaniko et al. [18], Fitzgerald et al. [27] and Stanton et al. [28] were randomised at student or individual level, while others were cluster-randomised to schools.

4. Page 6 we have provided the maximum and minimum attrition rates as it is impossible for us to calculate `median and mean\(\) attrition rates. The text now reads:

¿Sample sizes at baseline ranged from 315 [26] to 2,026 [22] while attrition rates ranged from 3.8% (at six months follow-up) [24] to 38.2% (at nine weeks follow-up) [32], a reflection of the high rates of attrition and school absenteeism common in African countries [33].

5. Page 14 line 7 should have been the verb `summarise\(\) rather than `summary\(\). We have rewritten he sentence to read as follows:

¿To summarise the effectiveness of interventions in the population represented within the scope of this review, we found that the most significant changes were reported in knowledge, being followed by changes in attitudes.\(\)

6. Search strategy in CINAHL is outlined in the text at the bottom of page 3 in greater detail. We have also taken the opportunity to outline the search strategy used for PsychINFO in a slightly greater detail. The text now reads:

¿A pilot search strategy with search terms around the main subject themes i.e. `studies\(\), `HIV and STI\(\), `school-based interventions\(\) and `limiting to Africa and to the period from 1986-2006\(\) was developed by the first author, under guidance from the second author, and conducted in Medline (see Table 1) before being adapted for use in Embase and Cinahl and citation alerts set up in these databases during the period of the study (April to July 2006). In Psych INFO (1985-2006) the `change database and re-run search strategy\(\ command was used with the Medline search strategy (Table 1), followed by exclusion of the term `exp Africa in the final combination of themes.\(\)

Reviewer II (Ademola Ajuwon)

1. The grammatical error has been revised. The sentence now reads:

¿Thirdly, unlike the similar 2004 review by Gallant and Maticka-Tyndale [11], we included only studies with control groups to ensure the highest quality studies (studies with control group have been shown not to differ systematically in estimating magnitude of effects whether randomised or non-randomised [15], and are ranked highest in hierarchy of study types [16]), and to reduce heterogeneity (based on initial consideration of possible meta-analysis).\(\)

2. The three sentences highlighted as vague (a,b,c) have all been revised to read as follows:

a. ¿To enable facilitators to effectively conduct the intervention and its monitoring training should be provided rather than assuming facilitators\(\) knowledge and
perceptions on the particular sexual health intervention under evaluation.

b. Future studies should be conducted after establishing an appropriate framework, i.e. one informed by both theory and research evidence from systematic reviews, qualitative studies and discrete choice experiments (which may ascertain participants preferences and justify the intervention and components or methods employed in its evaluation).

c. If training of staff, a theoretical basis and evidence-based interventions had been part of the studies in our systematic review it could have helped explanation why behavioural change has been so difficult to achieve in HIV/AIDS prevention programmes among Sub-Saharan African adolescents.

Finally, we have added the reference numbers to Tables 3 and 4 which makes it easier for the reader to get the full reference of each paper.

Thank you very much of behalf of my co-authors and I,

Dr. Virginia Paul-Ebhoimhen, Dr. Amudha Poobalan & Dr. Edwin van Teijlingen