Engaging delinquent adolescents in a school-based injury prevention program

At-risk adolescents

Injury is a leading cause of death for young people

1. The relationship between engagement in risk-taking behaviours and medically treated injury experience
   - Adolescent injury represents a major burden of disease and is largely preventable
   - Young people are over-represented in injury rates throughout Australia and the world
   - A major increase in risk-taking and delinquent involvement, such as alcohol use, occurs throughout adolescence, and often in a peer context
   - Involvement in risk-taking behaviours typically co-occur and are predictors of negative outcomes, such as transport-related injuries

2. Why early intervention is important
   - The direct and indirect costs of adolescent risk-taking place a substantial drain on society in many areas, such as medical care, juvenile justice and intervention needs
   - A positive relationship exists between adolescent risk-taking and jeopardised outcomes later in life
   - Adolescents who engage in delinquent behaviour prior to 14 years of age have an increased risk of participating in life-course persistent anti-social behaviour

3. What does this research tell us about how to engage delinquents in an injury prevention program?
   - A universal school-based injury prevention program targeting alcohol use, violence, and transport risks was delivered to year 9 students in Queensland (13-14 years of age)
   - A delinquency classification method was developed to evaluate how the intervention applied to delinquent adolescents

FAST FACTS

- Adolescents who engage in more than one ‘typical’ risk behaviour have a heightened risk of experiencing a medically treated injury
- Intervention needs to occur prior to the peak in adolescent risk-taking involvement which occurs from 14 years of age
- Delinquent adolescents are particularly vulnerable to harm due to involvement in multiple risk-taking behaviours, which often occur in a peer context
At-risk adolescents

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE**

- Underlying principles that can be applied to other health promotion interventions for delinquents were identified (e.g. for anti-bullying campaigns)
- Interventions related to risk-taking engagement need to start prior to Year 9, before involvement in activities such as alcohol use escalates
- Road safety behaviour in a peer context should be included in school-based interventions, with benefits for delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents (e.g. being a passenger in a car with a dangerous driver)
- The influences of maturation and the intervention on trajectories of delinquent involvement were evaluated. Statistically significant differences were found in the trajectories of delinquency and medically treated injury experiences of delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents
- The intervention was found to reduce medically treated injury experience and transport risks for delinquents over a 6 month period

4. **Engaging delinquents through universal delivery of school-based interventions**
- Universal delivery of school-based interventions are an effective way to reach adolescents on a continuum of delinquent involvement
- The Delinquency Classification method is a reliable way of evaluating intervention implementation and outcomes specific to the experience of delinquent adolescents

* This summary paper was written by Dr Kelly Dingli at the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

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