

Collaborating with secondary school students to co-create an intervention focused on promoting healthy relationships

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Background:

Primary prevention interventions aimed at addressing sexual violence frequently rely on deficit-based models or fear-based messaging. Such approaches fail to equip individuals with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for healthy, enjoyable relationships and sexual activities. In the school context, youth perspectives are rarely incorporated into the development of these interventions, meaning key messages may not be appropriately framed. Furthermore, interventions for upper secondary students (years 10-12) are particularly constrained by competing academic demands.

Approach:

This project involves a collaboration of three independent school sites, 15 student co-researchers, and university academics. The team has co-designed three classroom lessons tailored for upper secondary students. Quantitative and qualitative data from student surveys and focus groups at each school were also used to inform the intervention design. Following evidence-based guidelines, the intervention focuses on empowerment and skill development, using engaging teaching strategies and contemporary vignettes. A supplementary website has been created to provide students with additional information and provide connections to local services.

The intervention covers a range of topics, including:

- Qualities of a healthy relationship
- Skills to foster healthy connections
- Common healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviours
- Understanding consent
- Dealing with rejection
- Different stress responses (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)
- Bystander behaviour and how to support a friend
- Maintaining boundaries
- How to have awkward conversations

Outcome:

Pilot testing of the classroom lessons is currently underway. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation data, along with lessons learnt from the co-designing process will be shared at the conference.

Innovation and Significance:

The collaborative nature of this project ensures that the intervention is both evidence-based and reflective of youth perspectives. Critically, it adopts a strengths-based, sex-positive approach. The supplementary website further extends the intervention's reach by providing accessible resources and support beyond the classroom.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.