

## 1.12 World's most evaluated education programme also effective among New York's ethnic minorities

**Findings** The world's most evaluated substance education curriculum has been tested with mainly black or Latino inner-city New York youth from deprived areas. Seven schools were assigned either to routine education or to Life Skills Training, a 15-session (plus boosters) programme for 11–13-year-olds. The programme focuses on resistance skills (such as how to refuse offers of legal or illegal drugs without alienating friends) in the context of broader personal and social skills, and on the immediate 'teen-relevant' implications of substance use rather than long-term health. Teaching methods include interactive pupil-to-pupil activities such as group discussion, role play and feedback. It was delivered by the schools' usual teachers after a day's training.

721 of the 833 seventh-grade (normally 12–13 years old) pupils who completed baseline measures were re-tested three months later, after the education had taken place. After controlling for pre-existing differences, compared to controls Life Skills pupils less frequently smoked tobacco or cannabis, drank alcohol, or got drunk, and fewer intended to use these drugs over the next year. These outcomes seem to have been mediated by reducing pupils' estimates of how commonly drugs were used and boosting their use of refusal skills.

**In context** Evaluations of Life Skills Training provide the most robust counter to the generally justifiable pessimism over the preventive potential of drug education. An earlier study of the same programme reported reduced tobacco use and alcohol intoxication among white middle-class adolescents, enduring for at least five years. The current study shows that this curriculum (modified only slightly) performs better than New York's routine provision and might beneficially be introduced into multi-ethnic schools typical of inner cities. However, an earlier two-year follow-up study found that a curriculum more radically tailored to minority populations can confer extra benefits. In both studies impacts were not consistent across all drugs and use patterns, we do not know what the impact (if any) there was on use of drugs such as cocaine and heroin, and statistical significance may have been inflated because *schools* were allocated to the different curricula but results analysed in terms of individual *pupils* – the 'unit of analysis' issue (► *Glossary*).

Nuggets 1.11

LINKS

**Practice implications** Life Skills Training exemplifies the interactive approaches found most effective in a recent analysis of drug education. Curricula such as these delivered early in secondary school can reduce some forms of drug use across a range of school populations and are worth testing in the UK context. Although easily conveyed to teachers, the intervention is intensive and entails later booster sessions. There remains a query over whether the outcomes justify a substantial allocation of teaching resources during a key stage at which the UK curriculum is under severe pressure.

**Main sources** Botvin G.J., Epstein J.A., Baker F., *et al.* "School-based drug abuse prevention with inner-city minority youth." *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse*: 1997, p 5–19. Copies: apply ISDD.

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