

At a glance

A review of the effectiveness of community-based and out of education interventions in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of 11–25 year-olds.

Why we did this study

The prevention of mental health difficulties and promotion of wellbeing for young people is crucial so they are supported to be healthy and happy. The aim of this study was to synthesise existing evidence on interventions for promoting mental health and wellbeing provided outside of educational settings for young people 11 to 25 years.

What we did

We conducted a systematic review of systematic reviews that examined mental health and wellbeing promotion interventions delivered outside of educational settings for young people. We conducted additional searches on areas for which there was less information from previous reviews, and we also spoke to groups of young people at the start and end of the project and worked with a peer researcher.

What we found out

- We found evidence of positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing for interventions that involved exercise, sports/dance, life skills, social action projects, creative activities, mentoring, and mindfulness-based interventions.
- There was relatively little focus and/or analysis of inequalities in access, engagement, and impact in the included reviews and primary studies. However, the social action projects in the included review were generally focused on disadvantaged areas and marginalised groups of young people (e.g., minoritised ethnic groups).
- A range of factors that help and hinder access to and engagement with mental health promotion interventions were identified. In addition to what the intervention is, how the intervention is delivered is also important.

Why this is important

Our experts by experience described the importance of mental health promotion interventions provided outside of educational settings. These interventions provide support for young people who are not in education and those communities who might not have opportunities to connect in schools (e.g., Black young people, LGBTQIA+ young people, neurodivergent young people). These interventions provide a space away from a setting in which young people may be experiencing challenges, making it easier for young people to acknowledge if things are difficult and to open up. This might be particularly useful when bringing together young people who are struggling with similar things. Interventions outside of educational settings were also described as beneficial as they would encourage young people to leave the house.

What are the implications

There is an urgent need for more interventions (and research), beyond social action based projects, to be developed and evaluated with young people from marginalised groups.

Funding is needed to provide accessible and inclusive mental health promotion interventions outside of education. However, it is also important that such funding is consistent, to avoid such interventions (and their impacts) being transitory.

Research is needed to understand how to implement and engage young people with mental health promotion interventions outside of education. This research should focus on how to make the interventions engageable for young people, considering the factors identified in this report on what helps and hinders engagement.

Project Team

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