

Symposium 4 – #EIE2021

Chair: Dr Sanna Herkama (University of Turku) – Finland

Discussant: Dr Femke van Nassau – Netherlands

Presenters: Dr Elina Renko (University of Helsinki), Dr Silja Saarento-Zaprudin & Dr Sanna Herkama (University of Turku) – Finland

Implementation of school-based interventions to improve student well-being: Building blocks to bridge research with practice

Introduction

This symposium explores the complexities and boundaries faced when school-based programs to promote student well-being are disseminated nationwide after randomized controlled trial (RCT). Specifically, we will discuss how to effectively cross borders between science and practice when interventions are scaled up and possibly sustained over time. These questions are elaborated in the context of two programs developed in Finland called Let's Move It (LMI) targeted to improve physical activity (PA) among secondary school students (RCT 2015–17, dissemination from 2016–17 on) and KiVa antibullying program for basic education (RCT 2007–09, dissemination from 2009–10 on).

Presentation 1: Acceptability and implementation: Evaluating dissemination of a program to improve PA

Presenters: Dr Elina Renko & Ass. Prof. Nelli Hankonen (University of Helsinki)

Background

In order to be effectively implemented, intervention providers need to perceive the program as acceptable. This project presents a mixed methods evaluation of the implementation and dissemination of the LMI program to increase PA and reduce excessive sedentary behaviours in vocational schools. The implementation primarily involved a systematic and theory-based training intervention and user manual for school staff.

Project Aim

This project reports various dimensions of perceived acceptability among participating teachers, as well as program reach and implementation. It explores how the perceived acceptability of this training intervention (using the dimensions of the Theoretical Framework of Acceptability) relates to (un)successful implementation. The purpose is to evaluate (1) the experienced acceptability of the training intervention and anticipated acceptability of later delivering the program; (2) the reach and implementation, including adaptations and barriers; (3) the extent to which acceptability ratings predict teachers' intentions for implementation.

Project Methods

School staff (n=194) enrolled in a two-part training intervention, covering implementation of the LMI program and training in motivational interaction styles. Participants reported their perceived acceptability of the training intervention and their implementation efforts in online questionnaires

at baseline, after training sessions and at long-term follow-up. Qualitative data were analysed with content analysis and quantitative data with correlations and logistic regression.

Project Results

School staff rated the acceptability of the training intervention as very high on all assessed dimensions (average ratings exceeded 4.0 on a 5-point scale). The nationwide implementation reached at least 6,100 students and 341 school classes. Most teachers intended to continue program implementation, and higher ratings of acceptability were related to stronger subsequent intentions to implement the program. Teachers commonly reported condensing program content during implementation, and reported lacks of time and collegial support as the most common barriers to implementation.

Preliminary or final conclusion / discussion

This project presents the development and evaluation of the national real-world implementation of a PA program. Considerably high acceptability and reach of the training intervention indicates high potential for implementation success. The role of addressing the multiple facets of acceptability in implementation projects warrant more research focus. The strengths and limitations of this dissemination project are discussed in light of the Behaviour Change Science & Policy (BeSP) toolbox we are developing.

Presentation 2: Following up on the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of a whole-school program

Presenters: Dr Silja Saarento-Zaprudin, Tiina Turunen & Prof. Christina Salmivalli (University of Turku)

Background

Sustainability and effectiveness of school-based programs beyond RCTs remain rarely examined. This project presents findings from the Finnish context where schools implementing the KiVa anti-bullying program have been followed up since the scaling-up of the program in 2009. KiVa is an example of a complex whole-school program that includes both universal and indicated components. The program was first evaluated in an RCT during 2007–2009 with promising results (Kärnä et al., 2011a, 2013), after which it was disseminated nationwide. By the end of 2011, the program had reached around 90% of Finnish schools offering basic education (Herkama, Saarento & Salmivalli, 2017).

Project Aim

This quantitative study examines Finnish middle schools registered as users of the KiVa program, comparing them with schools that never registered. The extent to which indicators of active program implementation predict changes in bullying and victimization in the schools since 2009 is also explored. The aim is to address the question of whether there is evidence of effectiveness of the KiVa program when implemented in real-world conditions.

Project Methods

The study utilizes school-level longitudinal data collected from Finnish 8th and 9th graders as part of two large-scale survey studies: the annual KiVa student surveys and the biannual School Health Promotion Study. The combined sample consists of nearly 1,300 middle schools. Measures include self-reports of bullying and victimization and KiVa registry data regarding program implementation. Data will be analyzed using longitudinal structural equation modeling.

Project Results

Results will shed a light on the levels of, and rates of change in, bullying and victimization in KiVa schools and non-KiVa schools as well as on the implications of implementation-related indicators (e.g., timing of registration, response activity to annual KiVa surveys, and possible deregistration).

Preliminary or final conclusion / discussion

By combining longitudinal data from two large-scale survey studies, this project provides the first comparison of KiVa schools and non-KiVa schools in Finland since the initial RCT of the antibullying program. Challenges and possibilities in investigating the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of school-based programs in real-world conditions as well as implications for further research will be discussed.

Presentation 3: How to make it work? A qualitative investigation of facilitators and barriers to sustaining an antibullying program

Presenters: Dr Sanna Herkama (University of Turku), Mari Kontio (City of Turku), Dr Miia Sainio (University of Jyväskylä)

Background

In order to improve student safety and reduce bullying, effective interventions would need to be identified, profoundly implemented, and most importantly sustained after their trial period. This presentation concentrates on the sustainability of the KiVa antibullying program in real-life conditions since its national roll-out in Finland (from 2009–10 on). KiVa has been shown to be effective in reducing rates of being bullied and bullying others (Kärnä et al., 2011; Nocentini & Menesini, 2016).

Project Aim

The aim of this qualitative study is to give voice to teachers and headmasters and to explore facilitators and barriers to the sustainability of the KiVa program from the practitioners' perspective.

Project Methods

The study is based on interviews conducted among teachers implementing the KiVa program (n = 15, focus groups) and their headmasters (n = 15, individual interviews). The KiVa annual survey data from both students (2009–2016; N = 2,462 schools) and school staff (2010–2016, N = 1,915) was used to select the schools. Only schools with a declining trend in bullying in connection with active delivery of KiVa over several years were chosen for the study. The research material was analyzed by thematic analysis.

Project Results

According to the teachers and headmasters, key drivers promoting sustainability connected to the KiVa program itself were program feasibility and adaptability, recognizing the program's benefits in everyday life at school, and having realistic expectations about the program. Organizational features included school-level coordination, training, support, resources and management, antibullying values and commitment, as well as organizational culture and the integration of the program into everyday practices. Finally, broader contextual factors such as national curriculum, school's bullying prevention plan, communal-level decision-making, and media attention were found to contribute to program sustainment. Teachers emphasized the pedagogical aspects of program sustainment whereas headmasters tended to reflect more on issues connected to management and leading

change in the school community. In general, results emphasize the role of organizational factors in promoting the sustainability of the KiVa program in real-life conditions. Many factors identified were dualistic in nature: their presence fuelled whereas a lack of them hindered program sustainment. In addition, the key drivers were found to be intertwined and connected to each other.

Preliminary or final conclusion / discussion

Based on the results, five key building blocks of sustaining complex antibullying programs and overcoming implementation barriers under real-life conditions are introduced and reflected upon. Future avenues for harnessing the produced knowledge on program sustainability to support schools in antibullying work on a national level are also reflected upon.