Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study - What Do Children Want to Know?

ABSTRACT

The overall aim of the HBSC study is to gain insight into, and increase our understanding of young peoples’ health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context. Children are actively involved in providing data through completing questionnaires. However, there is increasing recognition that they can and should participate in research affecting their lives.1

This study aimed to enable young people to identify the HBSC topics they found most interesting and to document what they would like to know about them. It also aimed to explore the use of participatory research approaches with school children to facilitate their involvement in the research process.

A participatory research approach was taken. Students (10-18 years) in mixed-gender primary and post-primary schools in Ireland participated in school workshops approximately 40 minutes long. The protocol for the workshops (n=10) was piloted and after the introduction, group contract and ice-breaker, the following took place:

Snap game: 51 topic cards based on HBSC questions (e.g., nutrition, happiness) were given to each group. The cards were dealt out among group members and, each student placed a topic card on the table and stated whether they thought it was “interesting” or “not interesting”. The group then discussed whether they agreed or disagreed with the classification, resulting in two separate piles of cards: those labelled “not interesting” were removed. Each group then spread the pile of “interesting” cards on the table and ranked the topics they found the most “interesting” and would like to know more about.

Pizza chart construction: Each group received a blank pizza chart (large cardboard cut-outs of circles sub-divided into 12 sections) and art materials. Students pasted their top ranked 12 cards onto each pizza slice on the chart and wrote on the space surrounding each pizza slice what they would like to know about that topic.

This study involved active participation of children in the research process. This enabled them to clearly articulate the HBSC topics that they were most interested in and what they would like to know about these topics. Alcohol was the highest ranked topic, followed by, puberty, drugs, drunkenness, smoking, fighting, general health, body image, physical and emotional health, happiness and friendships. Students had multiple questions about these topics including; ‘how many children do this?’, ‘why are there differences between boys and girls?’ and ‘how can we change peoples’ attitudes’?

The findings of this study may be useful in guiding the development of curricular resources and other materials related to child and adolescent health promotion. This study provides a reference document for those working in health practice and policy in Ireland. The methodologies used can facilitate researchers, health promotion practitioners and policy makers to actively engage young people in research and thus inform practice and policies relating to health.

REFERENCES

Available on request.

PRESENTED

At the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Network in Cluj-Napoaca, Romania on June 17th 2011, by Natasha Clarke.

FUNDING

This research has received funding from the Department of Health.

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