

The Effects of Sexual Health Interventions on the Sexual Health Behaviors of Young Adults: An

Integrative Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Background: The immediate effects of comprehensive sexual education programs on adolescent sexual health behaviors have been well studied. However, there is little information regarding whether comprehensive sexual education programs targeted towards young adults have any effects on their sexual health behaviors, despite consistently poor sexual health outcomes among young adults, including high rates of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.

Objectives: The purpose of this integrative literature review will be to explore the existing research surrounding the short-term effects of comprehensive sexual education programs targeted toward young adults.

Methods: The literature review methodologies published by Whittemore and Knafl will be utilized to order, code, categorize and summarize the literature.

Results: Brief, one-time, information-motivation-behavioral skills (IMB) based interventions may improve the sexual health knowledge of young adults, but they are not effective at creating sustainable sexual health behavior change. Intensive, multi-session interventions are more effective at modifying behavior, but require extensive resources. Home-based interventions focusing on only the most relevant determinants of the IMB model for certain populations demonstrated promising results and may be a way for sexual health providers to conserve resources while still improving the sexual health outcomes of participants. Peer-led and self-guided, internet-based programs proved effective in reaching a larger and more diverse group of young adults, yet their outcomes were inconsistent. A structured internet-based program, including specific modules to be completed rather than an unstructured Facebook program or website referral may be the most effective of these programs at improving the information, motivation and sexual health behaviors of young adults.

Conclusion: This integrative literature review aimed to critically examine and synthesize the current literature surrounding the effects of comprehensive sexual education programs on the sexual health behaviors of young adults. There are definite, evidence-based methods to improve the sexual health information, motivation, behavioral skills and risky sexual behaviors of young adults. Future research should focus on young adults outside the traditional four year university environment and on the incorporation of the sexual health outcomes of young adults into the larger policy discussion surrounding sexual education programs in the United States.

Keywords: *comprehensive sexual education, risk reduction model, young adult, emerging adulthood, sexual health behavior, intervention, sexually transmitted infection, unintended pregnancy, sexual health*