

# **WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?**

## **LESSONS FROM SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS AT THE EPPI-CENTRE**

Angela Harden

Social Science Research Unit,  
Institute of Education, University of London

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# Acknowledgements

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# Issues

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- Key messages on ‘what works’, ‘what does not work’ and ‘what might work’
- Wider determinants of health
- Listening to children and young people
- Involving children and young people

# Why do systematic reviews?

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- One study may not be reliable as a guide to practice and policy
- Reviews bring together what we know
- Systematic reviews do it better than traditional reviews
- They involve explicit methods and transparency
- They can be updated when new research is published

# Review topics

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- Mental health
- Physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Sexual health
- Teenage pregnancy
- Teenage parenting
- Accidental Injury
- Walking and cycling
- Peer-led health promotion
- Incentives
- 'Life checks'
- Conflict resolution

# Re-occurring themes across reviews

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- Multi-component ‘joined’ up approaches
- Direct focus on health topic not always appropriate (or effective)
- Diversity amongst children and young people (e.g. gender)
- Patchy evaluation of interventions to tackle wider determinants of health
- Mis-match between interventions tested and children and young people’s perspectives and lives
  - School work and stress, bullying, violence, friendships, negotiating transition to adulthood

# **What works? What does not work? What might work?**

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- Helping children to eat more fruit and vegetables
- Preventing teenage pregnancy
- Supporting teenage parents

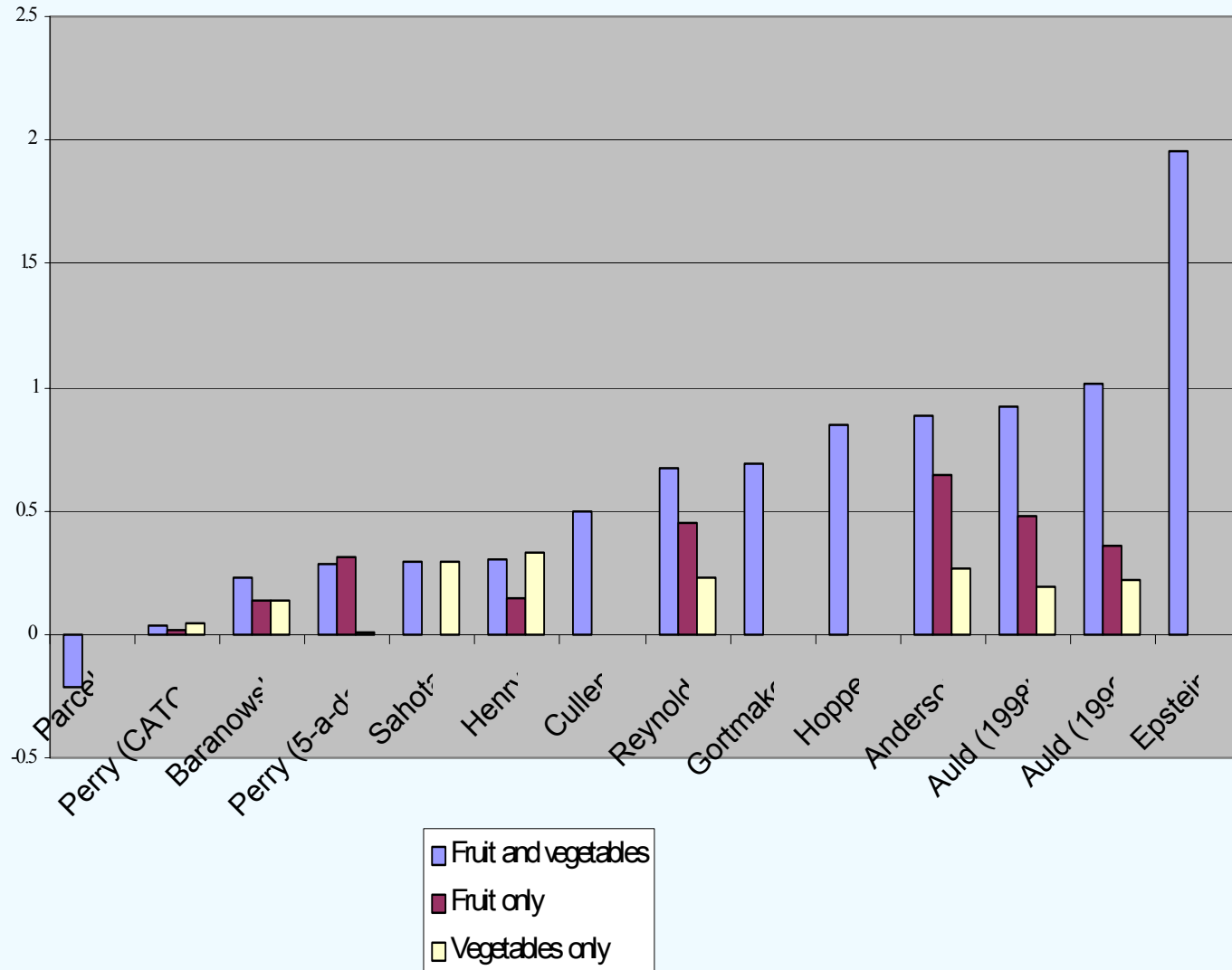
# Helping children to eat more fruit and vegetables<sup>1</sup>

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- Evidence focussed on school-based interventions
- On average, increase consumption by nearly half a portion per day

<sup>1</sup>Thomas J, Sutcliffe K, Harden A, Oakley A, Oliver S, Rees R, Brunton G, Kavanagh J (2003) *Children and Healthy Eating: A systematic review of barriers and facilitators*. London: EPPI-Centre.

# Effects of school-based interventions on children's fruit and vegetable intake



# What relates to effectiveness?

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- More effective: targeted interventions for parents with risk factors for cardiovascular disease
- Less effective: single component interventions, such as classroom lessons alone or providing fruit-only tuck shops.

# Children's perspectives and promising interventions

- 1) Children don't see it as their role to be interested in health.
- 2) Children do not see future health consequences as personally relevant or credible.
- 3) Fruit, vegetables and confectionary have very different meanings for children.
- 4) Children actively seek ways to exercise their own choices with regard to foods.
- 5) Children value eating as a social occasion.
- 6) Children recognise contradiction between what is promoted and what is provided.

**Brand fruit and vegetables as 'tasty' rather than 'healthy'.**

**Reduce health emphasis of messages**



**Do not promote fruit and vegetables in the same way within the same intervention.**

**Create situations for children to have ownership over their food choices.**



**Ensure messages promoting fruit and vegetables are supported by appropriate access to fruit and vegetables**

# Preventing teenage pregnancy<sup>2</sup>

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- Looking beyond sex education and sexual health provision
- Interventions to address the social disadvantage associated with teenage parenting
  - Youth development interventions
  - Early childhood interventions

<sup>2</sup>Harden A, Brunton G, Fletcher A, Oakley A (2006) *Young people, pregnancy and social exclusion*. London: EPPI-Centre.

# Effect of interventions on teenage pregnancy

- Youth development and early childhood programmes in the US reduce teenage pregnancy rates by 39%
- Compares to 'no effect' finding of sex education on teenage pregnancy rates<sup>1</sup>
- But are they appropriate for young people in London and elsewhere in the UK?

<sup>1</sup>DiCenso *et al.* (2002) Interventions to reduce unintended teenage pregnancies in adolescents: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials. *British Medical*

# Perspectives of young people in the UK

Dislike of school

Poor material circumstances and unhappy childhoods

Expectations/aspirations for the future

- Boredom
  - Frustration
  - Lack of relevance
  - Bullying
  - Violence
  - Housing
  - Family dysfunction and attractive options
  - Low expectations
  - Bad work experiences
  - Lack of local opportunities
- “Still be at school? I’d rather have a baby than that. I just didn’t like school, it was faster”  
“I haven’t grown up like school, it was hard, it was horrible”

# Promising interventions to test?

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- ***To improve experiences of school***
  - Involve young people in decision-making
  - Anti-bullying strategies
  - Teacher training for pastoral care and conflict resolution
- ***To broaden expectations***
  - Protect against bad experiences of work
  - Create more employment opportunities
- ***To tackle unhappy childhoods***
  - Domestic violence
  - Housing
  - Quality and continuity of care

# Supporting teenage parents<sup>2</sup>

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- Interventions to prevent the social exclusion associated with teenage parenting
  - Welfare interventions
  - Education and career development programmes
  - Holistic support programmes
  - Day care

<sup>2</sup>Harden A, Brunton G, Fletcher A, Oakley A (2006) *Young people, pregnancy and social exclusion*. London: EPPI-Centre.

# **Effect of interventions on young parents' participation in education and training**

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- **Welfare sanctions/bonuses and career development programmes in the US increase young women's participation in education and training by 21% and 213% respectively.....**
- **....but no effect of interventions on long-term employment**
- **Are they appropriate for young parents in London and the UK?**

# Perspectives of young parents

**Struggles against negative stereotypes of teenage mothers**

**Diverse needs and preferences but lack of choice**

**Heavy reliance on family**

**Wider costs and benefits of education and employment**

**Continuity of problems existing prior to parenthood**

**“Just ‘cause we’re young. They don’t treat you like proper families”**

- **Housing**
- **Childcare**
- **E.g. Relationship breakdown**
- **Education and Employment**
- **Violence**
- **‘Filling the gaps’ in service provision**
- **Feeling rushed back into education or employment**
- **Social as well as financial benefits**

# Promising interventions to test?

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- Anti-discriminatory policy and practice
- Creation of viable choices
  - Housing
  - Education
  - Employment
- Reality workers

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- Involving children and young people in research

# School-based review

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- Hatch End High School, Harrow
- A team of nine year 10 students;
- Five teachers, a librarian and a parent governor;
- An advisory group (policy makers and researchers in the field of relationships education)
- Main work of the review done by EPPI-Centre staff

# School-based review

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## Students selected the review question

- Initially we thought students might want to look at sex education
- But students wanted to know how to improve relationships
- Review question became, “Do planned educational interventions improve young people’s personal and social relationships?”
- Advisory group established once question set
  - to provide broader picture
- In-depth focus agreed by review group as whole
  - Effectiveness of peer mediation and conflict resolution

# School-based review

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## Results

- Studies showed that students were able to learn the techniques and reported some changes in their views
- Two studies that assessed the impact on school behaviour were disappointing
- One team is testing a promising approach that integrates the techniques into the general curriculum

# Conclusion

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- Gaps in evidence base but some useful messages for policy and practice (and for new research agenda)
- Need for a collaborative approach to generating, synthesising and interpreting evidence
- Listening to, and involving, children and young people can radically alter our knowledge and understanding.

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Email: [a.harden@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:a.harden@ioe.ac.uk)

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# Thank you

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Further details of EPPI-Centre reviews, tools and teaching can be found at:

<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk>