

HIV and Hepatitis Education for Homeless Youth: Art or Nurses?

What you need to know

Youth reported learning about HIV and hepatitis in both nurse-run and arts messaging formatted programs. Youth responded more positively to the nurse led program, learned more and reported that it had a more positive impact on their lives.

What is this research about?

Health education is important for youth who are experiencing homelessness. There are higher rates of homeless youth contracting HIV as well as hepatitis B & C viruses. In order for youth to protect themselves against contraction, they must be informed of the ways that these viruses are contracted.

There are several barriers that may contribute to higher risk for youth experiencing homelessness. These include higher rates of mental illness, like depression, psychosis and conduct disorder.

Two styles of education programming have been used for health promotion. Art Intervention has been shown to be effective in reaching troubled youth. The other form of education is Nurse-Led Hepatitis Health Promotion (HHP).



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youth homelessness, art messaging, nurse led intervention, Hepatitis A, B, C virus, HIV/AIDS transmission

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Nyamathi, A., Kennedy, B., Branson, C., Salem, B., Khalilifard, F., Marfisee, M. & Leake, B. (2013). Impact of Nursing Intervention on Improving HIV, Hepatitis Knowledge and Mental Health Among Homeless Young Adults. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 49 (2), 178-84.

What did the researchers find?

Youth were more likely to learn and experience an increased well-being in the nurse-led program. In the art messaging program, youth's knowledge of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis also increased, however, less dramatically. The youth in the art messaging program did not report an increase in well-being.

The nurse who led the program had extensive experience working with the population. The nurse was trusted by the youth and almost seen as a peer.

Youth who had partners were more likely to improve in HIV/AIDS knowledge scores. In addition, youth who identified as wanting "to get their lives together" were more likely to improve overall. Youth who had used hallucinogens were less likely to have learned through the sessions.

The **Canadian Homeless Research Network (CHRN)** has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization (Kmb)** Unit at York University to produce Research Summaries on the topic of Youth Homelessness in Canada. The CHRN focuses on education, networking and knowledge mobilization in order to move towards effective long-term solutions to homelessness.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers were interested in the impact of nurse-led HHP versus an art intervention among homeless youth. The researchers enrolled a sample of 156 youth between the ages of 15-25. The youth all frequented a drop in, reported experiencing homelessness and had used a substance in the past 6 months. The drop in was located in Los Angeles, California. Researchers measured their knowledge on hepatitis and HIV

prior and after the sessions. The nurse-led HIV/AIDS and hepatitis health promotion sessions consisted of 3 to 4, 45 minute sessions within 6 months. The art messaging program consisted of 3 to 4 sessions, lasting two hours each for a four week period. The art messaging program also included a one hour information session on HIV/AIDS and hepatitis infections.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Service providers who are designing new programs should keep in mind that experienced staff can make a big difference. Field staff that have experience and should be included in program design. However, it is still important to try new service delivery methods.

Policy makers should consider investing additional money into health education for homeless youth. Health education should be seen as a form of risk prevention.

Additional research can recreate this study with a greater number of programs, and in multiple cities. Interviews with staff may help explain the role of experience and rapport in running successful groups.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Dr. Adeline Nyamathi is Associate Dean for International Research and Scholarly Activity in the School of Nursing at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Barbara Kennedy, Catherine Branson, Benissa Salem, Farinaz Khalilifard, Mary Marfisee, Daniel Getzoff and **Barbara Leake** are also co-authors who were associated with the School of Nursing at the University of California, Los Angeles at the time of the research.