Sexual Violence Prevention Educator Training

Opportunities and Challenges

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Introduction

The public health approach to the primary prevention of gendered violence recognises the need to work from a multi-systemic approach. As Cares and colleagues (this volume) indicate, prevention of sexual violence is critical and ultimately needs to be about behaviour change. A key strategy for achieving this goal is the provision of educational programmes and strategies to assist in developing new cultural norms of non-violence. In recent years there has been a rapid growth in educational programme development and consistent calls for rigorous evaluation of these interventions (Morrison et al., 2004; Nation et al., 2003). While education remains a central pillar of the primary prevention of gendered violence, there is limited international research published on the process of designing, implementing and evaluating professional training of personnel who deliver such programmes. This is despite recognition that effective programmes require well-trained, reflective, sensitive and well-supported staff (Carmody et al., 2009; Evans, 2008; Nation et al., 2003; Whitaker et al., 2006).

This chapter will explore a range of factors that impact on the potential effectiveness of diverse personnel in delivering education within the gendered violence prevention field. While research will be drawn from the broader gender violence field, the main focus is on sexual violence. Opportunities and challenges will be explored surrounding issues of who the most suitable personnel to deliver violence prevention education are; approaches to educational training, including adult education principles; the importance of critical reflection on values and ethics by educators; skills in working with small groups; and the importance of evaluation of practice. Lessons learnt from other areas of public health prevention education, such as sexual health, youth violence...
and drug use, and the possible application of these areas to the prevention of sexual violence, will also be considered. Examples will be drawn from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The discussion of international research on the above areas will be drawn together in the final section of the chapter to suggest strategies for enhancing the training of personnel to deliver anti-violence education in a variety of settings.

**Educator training for primary prevention**

Unlike the United States, where violence prevention practitioners can potentially access training programmes (including the PREVENT programme run by the US Centers for Disease and Prevention), Australia currently has no national or centrally based training programmes for violence prevention educators (Runyan et al., 2005). To date, Australian sexual assault prevention educators have had little opportunity to increase their skill and knowledge via centralised avenues specific to primary prevention education. The Australian National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2009)) has funded a range of prevention education programmes under the Respectful Relationships funding programme recommended by the National Council. Despite this, there has been no direct leadership from government in developing a national approach to educator training. Without this policy leadership, education programmes are developed and delivered in an ad hoc manner with few opportunities for staff to increase their skills in delivering primary prevention education. Accountability is only required if organisations receive some government funding, and measures of success are often tied to reporting on the number of children and young people who participated in the education programme.

In the United Kingdom, the kind of education to be delivered is still contested, and there is a reluctance to accept the need to include gendered violence as part of the approach used within schools and after-care settings (Ellis, 2004; 2008; Maxwell, this volume). The paucity of detailed discussion around the preparation of personnel to provide violence prevention education raises a number of issues that require urgent attention. These include the range of theoretical approaches to gendered violence; the kinds of people who are best suited to provide prevention education; the kind of training and support each group needs; the range of subjectivities available to educators trained within different models; and whether educators are seen as holders of expert knowledge, as facilitators or as peers. Other issues emerge about who decides the ethical stance that will underpin the messages educators deliver. How the skills of educators are matched with particular subpopulations and the assumption that all educators can work with all groups also require consideration. The lack of clearly