

Improving intersectoral working in schools: learning for the future from the COVID-19 pandemic

Authors : **Nicola J Gray**¹, **Shraddha Manandhar**², **Catherine Chabot**³, **Didier Jourdan**³

N.J.Gray@hud.ac.uk

1 : UNESCO Chair 'Global Health & Education', University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom

2 : School of Human and Health Science, University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom

3 : UNESCO Chair 'Global Health & Education', Université Clermont Auvergne, France

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenge for school staff to integrate protective health measures into their academic daily responsibilities. The aim of this abstract, within a wider study of safe school re-opening, is to analyse improvements proposed for intersectoral working in schools by health and education professionals, based on their experience of the pandemic.

Methods

In 2021, an online survey was conducted in 6 languages with education and health professionals, followed by optional online semi-structured interviews. These methods explored the: 1-effect of the pandemic on schools/pupils/teachers; 2-reorganisation of schools; 3-experience of implementing infection control measures in schools; 4-intersectoral working; 5-important resources for keeping schools open.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English where needed. A directed content analysis was undertaken of interview transcripts and free-text survey responses regarding intersectoral working perspectives.

Results

The results are based on a combined analysis of data from 2072 survey responses from health and education professionals from 73 countries) and 32 follow-up interviews (18 education professionals and 14 health professionals from 25 countries).

Five themes of improvement for the future were identified: create formal coordination between the two sectors to support intersectoral working; that the health sector provide clear information and guidelines; bring health staff into school (especially medical staff); communicate more across all stakeholders (community, parents, students); and a call for capacity-building among education professionals by the health sector.

Conclusions

From the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health sector should lead the development of collaborative structures, implementation strategies and activities to support intersectoral alliances in the school environment for everyday well-being, ready for future health crises.

Main messages:

1 : During the COVID-19 pandemic, many education and health professionals felt the need for more - and strengthened - collaboration in schools for future health crises.

2 : Public health professionals could take a leading role in this strengthening strategy, supporting intersectoral alliances and promoting capacity-building in order to improve well-being and resilience.