

Educators' perspectives of HealthWise Zambia - an evidence-based, life and leisure skills programme in Zambian high schools

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Introduction: HealthWise is an evidence-based, life skills programme that aims to prevent substance use and sexual risk behaviour, and promote health in adolescents through exploration, skill development and participation in healthy leisure. The leisure focus offers opportunities for occupational therapy involvement in mainstream high schools. HealthWise was implemented successfully in 65 high schools in South Africa. The next logical step was to determine if HealthWise was beneficial in other African countries. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted to implement and evaluate HealthWise in high schools in Lusaka, Zambia.

Objective: The objective was to understand educators' perspectives of the usefulness and relevance of HealthWise for adolescents in Zambia.

Method: Six public high schools in Lusaka were randomly selected to participate in the study. Twelve educators from the schools were trained to implement the HealthWise curriculum with Grade 8 and 9 learners over a two-year period. A process evaluation was conducted using mainly qualitative research methods. Educators completed lesson evaluation forms comprising checklists and open-ended questions, and participated in four focus groups to reflect on their experiences of teaching HealthWise. Findings showed that the educators felt positive about the programme and that it was relevant for Zambian adolescents, although some challenges were experienced such as teaching the sexuality components.

Implications for practice: The study provides insight into HealthWise's relevance and cultural acceptability, and suggests a role for occupational therapy in Zambian high schools. Furthermore, the study contributes to developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions in Africa.