

Comparing procedures for selecting peer motivators to spread health messages within their social network: A cluster-randomized controlled trial

Introduction. The main aim of this study was to compare the effectiveness of selecting a social network's most influential children with the effectiveness of randomly selecting children to act as peer motivators encouraging their classmates' water consumption.

Method. Dutch children (9-13 years) were randomly assigned by school to (1) an intervention targeting the most influential peer motivators ($n = 112$), (2) an intervention targeting randomly selected peer motivators ($n = 131$), or (3) a control condition (no intervention; $n = 127$). The intervention consisted of a training that facilitated the peer motivators with the skills to promote water consumption among their classmates for eight weeks. All children filled out paper-and-pencil questionnaires at baseline and post-intervention.

Results. Repeated measures ANCOVAs indicated that children exposed to the intervention targeting the most influential peer motivators and children exposed to the intervention targeting randomly selected peer motivators increased their water consumption compared to nonexposed children. However, this increase was only found for children who initially did not consume much water, and was only marginally significant for children exposed to the intervention targeting the most influential peer motivators, and not significant in the other two conditions.

Conclusion. These findings tentatively suggest that a social network's most influential children might be more likely to elicit changes in their classmates' health related behaviors than random children. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: social network intervention, peer influence, water consumption, sugar-sweetened beverages