



Introduction

- Adolescents comprise around 25% of the Caribbean population. Past studies report that the challenges faced by this target group include substance use, mental health, violence, high risk sexual behaviours such as HIV, juvenile delinquency, obesity, accidents and injuries, among others.
- Through the understanding of the adolescent health risk behaviours, challenges, their health risks and protective factors, can we then comprehend and generate solutions to the challenges faced by youth in the Caribbean. This review will focus on the years 2006-2020, where we will determine what has or has not changed from the last review (from 1985-2005) and what solutions can be implemented.

Objectives

- To summarize data collected from the literature and classify the prominent health risks in adolescents in the English-speaking Caribbean for the years 2006 to 2020.
- To summarize prevalence rates where available, and the risk factors and protective factors of each of the identified categories.
- To compare the findings of this review (2006 - 2020) to that of the previous review (1980 to 2005) and highlight notable changes.
- To compare our findings to international literature.

Methodology

- A search of online databases (PubMed, Med Carib, UWILinc, UWI Space) as well as hand searching of journals (West Indian Medical Journal) throughout a period of four months (January-April 2021) was conducted.
- General searches such as “adolescent health in the ESC” were done to assess the broad sub-topics of adolescent risk behaviours after which more detailed searches were then conducted throughout the years using specific risk behaviours identified.
- Papers identified were screened, combined in tabular form, discussed and a variety of domains were arrived at by consensus. Summaries were written.

Results

A total of 121 papers were analysed on the following topics.

SUBSTANCE USE

- Alcohol consumption: 42.8% of adolescents aged 12 -22 used alcohol in last month; cigarettes: 9.9% and marijuana: 8%.

HIGH-RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

- Early sexual initiation in the Caribbean occurs before the age of 15 years; there is also an inconsistency in the use of a condom or contraceptive method.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

- It is estimated that about 20% of Caribbean women have at least one child by the age of 19. Caribbean fertility rate is 60.2 per 1000 girls in the age range 15-19 years.

HIV/AIDS

- The prevalence rate of HIV among youth aged 15-24 years is 2% of the Caribbean population.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Depression was found to be more common in early and middle adolescents. The suicide incidence in adolescents was 1.1 per 100 000. *Bullying also contributed to a higher suicide rate as greater than 15% reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- **This topic was detailed in its own section*

VIOLENCE

- Younger adolescents are more physically aggressive than older adolescents, who possess greater levels of indirect aggression.

JUVENILE DELIQUENCY

- The biggest risk factor for juvenile delinquency was gang involvement (which is associated with perceived availability of handguns, residential mobility, intention to use drugs, having parents who favour antisocial behaviour, early initiation of antisocial behaviour, having antisocial peers and having peers who use drugs)

OBESITY

- 30% of the adolescent population are obese.

BULLYING AND VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS were also subtopics noted.

Discussion

- There has been a burgeoning of medical education, research expertise and health researchers in the ESC. Among the papers analysed, the area of obesity showing the highest growth in comparison to the past review. Adolescent obesity is growing at a faster rate in the English-speaking Caribbean; being caused by the major factors such as unhealthy eating and physical inactivity. Notably, no papers were found detailing weight controlled behaviour, which plays a significant role in obesity.
- This review finds family connectedness and support to be protective to mental health, preventing substance abuse, high risk sexual behaviour and the negative effects of bullying.
- We identified no papers addressing the effect of screen time, social media, and technology use on the mental health of adolescents.
- Few interventions studies were identified for the themes present, alluding to more research needed in this aspect.

Conclusion

Based on the plethora of information obtained, analysed and reviewed, it was found that these findings mirror previous work. There is an opportunity for interventions and policy to address these findings at the earliest, in order to safeguard the safety of our Caribbean youth.

References

This paper is a review of more than 140 papers published between a span of fifteen years, and as such, the references used to assemble this piece of literature is too much to be listed.

Instead, the references have been tabulated and made easily accessible via the link below.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Mb2DamzqtUaLYQC1Vm3m8oNwsnRN3O_K-6mj0-bCbHA/edit?usp=sharing

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