



Implementing a regional School Health Research Network in the South-West of England

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About the research

There is an increased need for prevention and early intervention surrounding young people’s health and well-being. Schools offer a pivotal setting for this with evidence suggesting that focusing on health within schools improves educational attainment. One promising approach is the creation of School Health Research Networks (SHRNs) which exist in Wales and Scotland but are yet to be developed and evaluated in England.

SHRNs use a whole system approach to facilitate health improvement in schools in that it brings together stakeholders and communities to develop a shared understanding of how best to improve school-aged children’s health and well-being, a collaborative model that goes beyond typically commissioned school surveys.

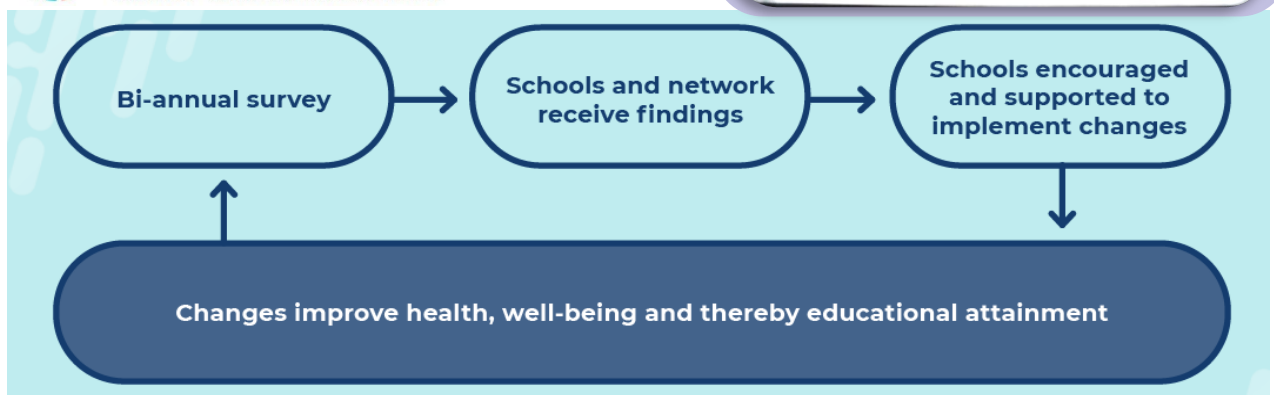
Key Implications:

- Make benefits clear to schools and ensure participation is not overly burdensome
- Provide detailed data reports to improve knowledge, facilitate change and inform interventions
- Support schools to interpret report findings to take meaningful data-driven action
- Develop in partnership with existing organisations and service providers to maximise relevance and avoid repetition
- Network findings should become meaningfully embedded within existing policy and practice

Study Design

This qualitative process evaluation aimed to identify the main barriers and facilitators to implementing a pilot SHRN. 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff, local authority members, and other key stakeholders.

Figure 1: An overview of the SW-SHRN process



About the School

The NIHR School for Public Health Research is a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield; Bristol; Cambridge; Imperial; and University College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); LiLaC – a collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster; and Fuse - The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities.

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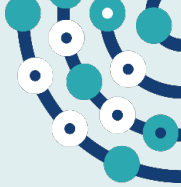


Figure 2: Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Key barriers to SW-SHRN

1.1 Academic attainment vs. health & well-being

1.2 Schools feel overwhelmed with surveys

1.3 Competing with commissioned surveys

1.4 Scarcity of school time & resource

Theme 2: Key facilitators to SW-SHRN: providing evidence-based support for schools

2.1 Improved knowledge to facilitate change

2.2 Feedback reports & benchmarking

2.3 Data to inform interventions

Theme 3: Effective dissemination of findings

3.1 Interpretation & implementation

3.2 Embedding findings with existing evidence/policy

3.3 Centralised online platform & direct personalised communication

3.4 Sharing findings with young people and families

Theme 4: Longer-term facilitators: ensuring sustainability

4.1 Keeping schools engaged

4.2 Repeat surveys & evaluating intervention impact

4.3 Informing school inspection frameworks

4.4 Expanding reach & enhancing accessibility

Summary of results and conclusions

We identified four key themes (1) Key barriers to SW-SHRN; (2) Key facilitators to SW-SHRN: providing evidence-based support to schools; (3) Effective dissemination of findings; and (4) Longer-term facilitators: ensuring sustainability. To ensure effective implementation and sustained growth, School Health Research Networks in England need to provide clear benefits to schools and ensure participation is not overly burdensome. Schools should be provided with detailed data reports to improve knowledge, facilitate change and inform interventions, and should be supported in interpreting report findings in order to take meaningful data-driven action. The network should develop in partnership and close communication with existing organisations and service providers to maximise relevance, avoid repetition and become meaningfully embedded in existing policy and practice.

Further information

Further details as well as the full academic papers are available at:

<https://www.nihrsphr.link/sw-shrn>

<https://swshrn.blogs.bristol.ac.uk>

Contact the researchers

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