The consultation of youth in the public health care policy-making process

Dear Editor:

Innovative solutions are necessary to address the complex public health issues affecting adolescents, and direct input from this population needs to be considered as a critical component to arrive at sustainable solutions. In general, however, research and discussion of adolescent public health issues are conducted by adults and exclusively represent adult perspectives.

The World Health Organization¹ has recognized this discrepancy and has incorporated input from adolescents from 104 countries in a recent publication on global adolescent health issues, covering the following key aspects of their health and well-being: i) adolescents' understanding of health, including the factors that influence it; ii) adolescents' views about priorities among health issues; iii) barriers to and use of health services; and iv) adolescents' opinions about how their health could be improved.¹

In British Columbia, and Canada at large, two leading causes of death in the adolescent population are motor vehicle crashes and suicide.²⁻⁴ Recently the British Columbia coroner's office has produced two extensive reports on adolescent motor vehicle crashes and suicides respectively; however, these reports – which included policy recommendations – were published without prior consultation with adolescents.^{3,4}

The proposed recommendations would likely have increased relevance and improved chance of success if input from adolescents had been sought out.

We need to gain significant insights into how adolescents think about their own problems and their perspectives on the solutions to their problems. Adolescents should have opportunities to meaningfully participate in policy recommendations. In general, there need to be wider opportunities and open channels for adolescents to facilitate their own participation in these important discussions. It is also important that their voices are incorporated into these adult-derived solutions and recommendations. If we are to achieve genuine and long-lasting solutions for the burning public health issues for today's adolescents, there need to be sincere efforts to understand these problems from adolescents' perspectives.

I humbly request the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* to revise their current author guidelines to encourage future study authors on adolescent-research-based manuscripts to include a compulsory adolescent consultation on their study recommendations. Obviously, this would provide an important opportunity for researchers to have a validity check of their recommendation from an adolescent's point of view. In addition, this would provide a forum for adolescents to share their viewpoints about their own issues as well as solutions to improve outcomes. Further, through active involvement in policy recommendations, adolescents can take ownership of these solutions for their own problems.

Alternatively, CJPH could create a community outreach pilot project for promising Canadian high school students by providing one or two annual summer research manuscript reading and peer-review training internships. The idea behind the program is to train two promising high school students on how to read manuscripts carefully and with attention to detail and to provide constructive feedback appropriately. Interns who excel in the training should be given an opportunity to be student peer reviewers for the journal. Their sole role would be to give constructive feedback on manuscripts related to adolescent health that are submitted for publication in CJPH. This program would also help develop our next generations of effective peer reviewers and versatile Journal editors.

Furthermore, authors of manuscripts submitted to the CJPH on adolescent-related topics may be given an option as to whether or not their manuscripts get peer-reviewed by adolescent peer reviewers. If an author accepts, then his or her manuscript would be sent to adolescent peer reviewers to read and endorse the practical validity of the policy proposal presented as a solution for the particular adolescent problem. If implemented, obviously this adolescent-centered additional peer-review feedback system would provide necessary validation for the solutions presented by the adult researchers.

Thank you for your consideration.

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doi: 10.17269/CJPH.107.5446

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to my English teacher (Ms. Mangat) for her guidance; to all the teachers I have had for their support and for mentorship for my basic idea; and finally to Dr. Sesath Hewapathirane and Mr. Iqbal Chaudhry for their guidance and assistance with this letter.

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