

Large evidence base for impact of intergenerational interventions involving young and old, but many gaps in research



Intergenerational activity can have a positive impact on participants, for example, in reducing loneliness and exclusion.

What is the aim of this evidence and gap map (EGM)?

The aim of this EGM is to identify all the existing research evidence on intergenerational interventions to improve understanding about intergenerational activities in terms of the health and social care outcomes of older people, younger people and children, and to inform future research.

There is a considerable body of research evidence on intergenerational interventions and their impact on older people and children and young people. However, there are still many research gaps, and primary research could benefit from more consistency in outcome reporting.

What is this evidence and gap map about?

Opportunities for social connection between generations in the UK have diminished over the last few decades because of changes in the way that we live and work. The Office for National Statistics Community Life Survey 2020-2021 reports that 6% of adults in the UK said they often or always felt lonely. People aged 16 to 24 were significantly more likely to report feeling lonely often or always, which is 11% of that age group. Nine percent of people aged 65 years and over reported the same.

Evidence suggests that intergenerational activity can have a positive impact on participants, for example, in reducing loneliness and exclusion for both older people and children and young people, improving mental health, increasing mutual understanding, and addressing important issues such as ageism, housing and care.

However, knowing what to implement, how and for whom is complex due to the lack of evidence about their effectiveness, transferability of effects across settings and cost-effectiveness. This evidence gap map (EGM) identifies the nature, volume and types of intergenerational interventions found in the research literature. It identifies areas for future research and evidence synthesis to help decision makers make more informed choices.

What studies are included?

The EGM includes 500 research articles of any design on intergenerational interventions that do not include family members. The evidence comes from 27 countries.

We identified 26 systematic reviews, 236 quantitative comparative studies (of which 38 were randomised controlled trials), 227 qualitative studies (or had a qualitative element), 105 observational studies (or had elements of observational methods) and 82 with a mixed-methods approach.



How up-to-date is this EGM?

The authors searched for studies published up to July 2021.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary is based on Campbell, F., Whear, R., Rogers, M., Sutton, A., Robinson-Carter, E., Barlow, J., Sharpe, R., Cohen, S., Wolstenholme, L., & Thompson-Coon, J. (2023). Non-familial intergenerational interventions and their impact on social and mental wellbeing of both younger and older people—A mapping review and evidence and gap map. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 19, e1306. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1306>.

The interactive EGM can be accessed here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/pb-assets/assets/18911803/EPPI%20Mapper-1674483613.html>

Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.

What are the main findings of this EGM?

The most commonly reported outcomes for children and young people were attitudes towards older people, knowledge and attainment, and intergenerational interactions.

For older people the most commonly reported outcomes were mental wellbeing, agency, attitudes towards younger people, and intergenerational interactions.

We identified several gaps in the research, including research on mutual, societal and community outcomes, young people's mental health, loneliness, social isolation, peer interactions, physical health and health promotion, outcomes centred on caregiver wellbeing, mental health and attitudes, and adverse or unexpected outcomes, including economic outcomes.

Interventions were most commonly delivered in schools, in the community or in care homes.

Interventions most commonly involved activities related to sharing perspectives of being an older or younger person/child, spending time together, helping with chores, helping more generally within a school environment, mentoring, art and crafts to engage the generations together, learning or sharing music and playing games.

What do the findings of this EGM mean?

The EGM provides a starting point for researchers and decisionmakers to access the available research evidence on the effectiveness of intergenerational interventions.

The map demonstrates considerable diversity in the types of intergenerational activity. It also shows that it is mainly demonstration projects that are evaluated.

The quality of the evaluations makes analysis of their effectiveness, and hence their impact on shaping practice and policy, limited.

Methods of supporting useful evaluations of these types of interventions – so they are measuring meaningful outcomes – is needed. This EGM identifies many areas where there are still gaps in research.

