

## Preventive health care, 2000 update: prevention of child maltreatment

Harriet L. MacMillan\* (article edited to include only the section relevant to sexual abuse prevention)

**Objectives:** To update the 1993 report from the Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Examination (now the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care) by reviewing the evidence for the effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing child maltreatment described in the scientific literature over the past 6 years.

### ***Education programs for children to prevent sexual abuse***

Since the task force's 1993 update, 2 systematic reviews have examined the effectiveness of education programs in preventing sexual abuse.<sup>36,37</sup> One review concluded that education programs aimed at preventing child sexual abuse and abduction can improve knowledge and prevention skills of children under experimental conditions.<sup>36</sup> However, whether education of children can lead to a reduction in the incidence of child sexual abuse and abduction remains to be established. Results of a meta-analysis by Rispens and colleagues<sup>37</sup> indicated that victimization prevention programs are successful in teaching children sexual abuse concepts and self-protection skills, but the authors emphasized that transfer of these skills to real-life situations has not been shown.

Since the 1993 update, several additional studies evaluating the effectiveness of programs for the prevention of child sexual abuse have been published ([Table 1](#)).<sup>29,30,31,32,33,34,35</sup> None of these randomized controlled trials addressed the outcome of reduction in occurrence of sexual abuse, and so they will not be reviewed in detail. A unique cohort study with a nationally representative sample of 2000 youths and their caretakers showed that, at 1-year follow-up, children exposed to school-based prevention programs reported that they were more likely to disclose an incident of victimization than those not exposed to such programs.<sup>38,39</sup> However, exposure to such prevention programs was not associated with any decrease in self-reported victimization.

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