School-based cancer prevention: "I care for me for you" to promote healthy lifestyles

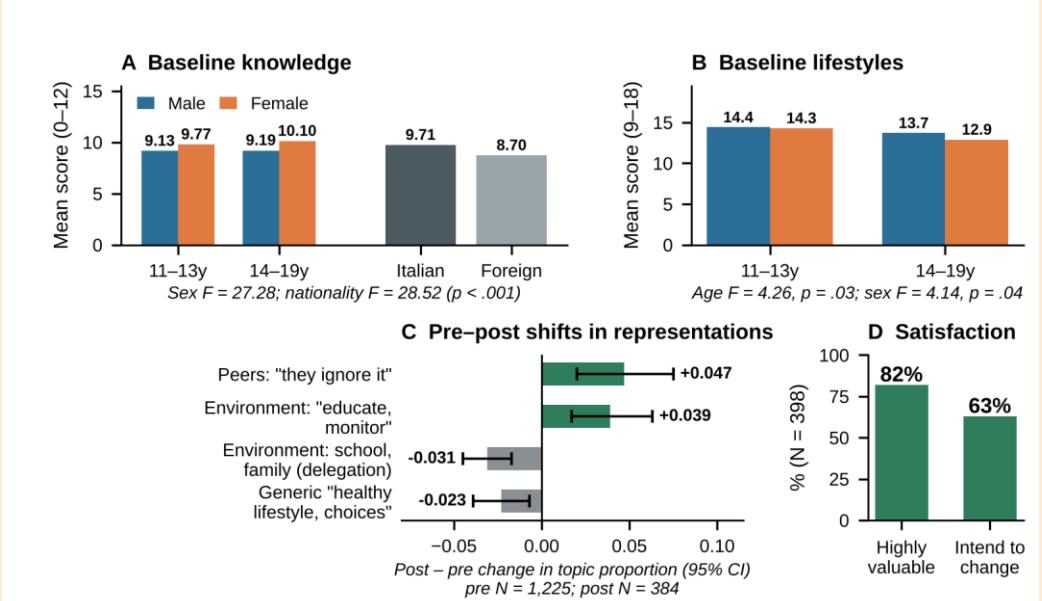
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Introduction

Cancer remains a leading cause of global mortality, with nearly 20 million new cases in 2022 (WHO, 2022). Adherence to WCRF/AICR prevention recommendations is associated with a 10–61% reduction in cancer incidence and mortality (WCRF, 2021; Kohler, 2016), and the European Cancer Plan (2021) estimates that 40% of cancers are preventable through healthy lifestyles and screening. Adolescence is a critical "window of susceptibility": risk behaviors (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, inactivity, unbalanced diet, unprotected sex, excessive UV exposure) become established and persist into adulthood (Santelli et al., 2013; Parajuli & Prangthip, 2025). Based on this evidence, ASL Città di Torino, with the Oncology Network of Piedmont and Aosta Valley and the support of Fondazione CRT, developed “I care for me for you”, a school-based cancer prevention program.

Aims

To enhance cancer prevention literacy, shift health representations toward protective behaviours and strengthen empowerment in pre-adolescents and adolescents.





Student stamp design
by Russo Cerioli

Methods

Quasi-experimental pre-post design: 4,746 students (aged 11–19) in Piedmont and Aosta Valley; 1,224 completed T0 and 783, T1. Two interactive two-hour sessions based on: **Service learning** (Tapia, 2006; Fiorin, 2016), students designed a health promotion campaign for peers and families, applying the knowledge received from experts and teachers on lifestyles that reduce cancer risk**. Life skills** (WHO, 1993): critical thinking toward persuasive strategies of the tobacco, alcohol and food industries and toward health-related fake news; decision making; effective communication and assertiveness under peer pressure. Several instruments were administered:

T0 · Baseline
knowledge, lifestyles, cognitive style, INFO

→

Intervention
2 sessions + class campaign work

→

T1 · Post-test
INFO narrative instrument

Results

Baseline. Knowledge was high (M = 9.6/12), higher in females and Italian students; lifestyle adherence was higher in 11–13-year-olds and males. Knowledge and behaviour were only weakly related (ρ = .07).
Representations (pre–post). Students shifted from “institutional delegation” to personal responsibility and moved away from generic notions of a healthy lifestyle, showing greater agency and a more realistic view of peer indifference.
Cognitive style. No robust association with representations (exploratory analysis).
Satisfaction. 82% rated the project highly valuable; 63% intended to change a health-risk behaviour.

Conclusions

“I care for me for you” is a promising school-based model of cancer prevention in the Italian context. By combining Service learning and Life skills, it moved adolescents from passive recipients to active health promoters, shifting representations towards responsibility and agency.

References. - Tapia, M. N. (2006). Il Service-Learning nella scuola: Teorie e pratiche di solidarietà e apprendimento. Città Nuova. - World Health Organization. (1993). Life skills education for children and adolescents in schools (WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7A Rev.1). - World Health Organization. (2022). Global cancer burden growing, amidst mounting need for services.