

School-Based Violence Prevention Programs To Reduce Bullying and Aggressive Behaviors

Review 8

Wilson, S. J., Lipsey, M. W., & Derzon, J. H. (2003). The effects of school-based intervention programs on aggressive behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(1), 136–149. PubMed abstract available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12602434>.

Objectives	Assess the evidence for the effectiveness of school-based programs for preventing or reducing aggressive behavior in students, distinguish results of research-oriented demonstration programs from those of practice-oriented programs, and examine change in aggressive behavior.
Studies Included	Two hundred twenty-one U.S. and international studies published from 1950 to 1999
Participants in the Studies	Preschool to high school students
Outcomes	Behavioral changes in aggressive behavior, exclusive of changes in attitudes, skills, and intentions; aggressive behavior, broadly defined (including fighting, bullying, person crimes, aggressive behavior, behavior problems, conduct disorder, and acting out)
Limitations of the Studies	Nearly all studies were demonstration or research programs. All these programs had significantly more researcher involvement in training and supervision of delivery personnel than did the routine practice programs.

Results

Both universal and selective/indicated programs were characterized as either demonstration programs (researcher implemented and evaluated, for research/demonstration purposes) or routine practice programs (ongoing programs that already exist in schools, with school-based or outside researcher-based evaluations). Programs were not excluded if they consisted of multimodal/comprehensive components, were conducted in special schools or classes, or were implemented internationally.

Features of the various programs included—

- Social competence training, with or without cognitive behavioral components
- Behavioral and classroom management techniques
- Therapy or counseling
- Peer mediation
- Academic and educational services

- Review of disciplinary policies

The program personnel included researchers, teachers, school administrators, counselors, laypeople, and other personnel. The extent of personnel training was not specified. The interventions were delivered to individuals, groups, classrooms, and schools. Duration of the programs varied from 1 week to more than 38 weeks.

There were significant reductions in aggressive behavior in the intervention groups as compared with control groups. A curvilinear relationship was revealed between age and effect size, such that preschool and high school groups showed the largest effects. Successful demonstration programs were associated with certain study, subject, and intervention characteristics; specifically, higher-risk youth showed greater reductions in aggressive behavior than lower-risk groups, and interventions were generally more effective when they were implemented well and were relatively intense, used one-on-one formats, and were administered by teachers. Program effects did not vary greatly based on age, gender, or ethnic mix of the research samples. Routine practice programs were much less prevalent than demonstration programs and revealed minimal impacts on aggressive behavior. The findings support the premise that school-based programs aimed at reducing existing aggression are more effective than those that focus on the prevention of aggressive behavior.