INSPIRE EVIDENCE UPDATE

Education and life skills

Objective

Increase children's access to more effective, gender-equitable education and social-emotional learning and life-skills training and ensure that school environments are safe and enabling.

Rationale

Gains in education for both girls and boys, as measured by school enrolment and attendance, protect against both victimisation and perpetration of certain forms of violence, including childhood sexual violence, youth violence, partner violence, and structural risk factors for violence, such as child marriage and child labour. These advances also protect against the consequences of violence, including increased risk for HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy.

Schools provide an important space where children, teachers, and education personnel can learn and adopt pro-social behaviours that can contribute to preventing violence within the school and wider community. School-based programmes can prevent violence against children by enhancing communication, conflict management and problem-solving skills, and assisting the development of positive peer-to-peer relationships. While schools are an especially important space where violence curricula and programmes can be delivered, they can also be provided in informal settings such as community centres (for children not in school) and refugee camps. Many programmes include age-specific modules that range from pre-school to secondary-school ages.


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The *Education and life skills* strategy includes efforts to support school participation, create safe and supportive school environments, and build students' skills in relationships, communication, managing emotions, conflict resolution, and self-defence. Implementation of this strategy includes supportive legislation and policy, training and capacity building for school staff, and additional support mechanisms for ensuring safe and enabling school environments.

These mechanisms also include multisectoral collaboration involving all stakeholders in education: administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the wider community.

Many of the evidence-based programmes featured in INSPIRE can be implemented by individual schools or school systems. However, the whole education sector plays a critical role in implementing the complementary approaches in this strategy. A systems approach to preventing violence through education policy may reach more children and typically involves planning, training and support for school staff, mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, dedicated resources, and collaboration with other sectors.

Approach

Safe and enabling school environments

Safe schools (or whole-school approaches to violence prevention) focus on building a positive school climate and violence-free environment, and strengthening relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. These interventions are often multicomponent programmes that operate at multiple levels of influence (e.g., improving students' knowledge and behaviours, instituting new classroom rules or increased supervision, staff development, or establishing school policies against bullying) and can also involve parents and/or wider communities.

- **Evidence:** Across high- and low- and middle-income countries, there is strong, consistent evidence that whole-school approaches reduce both bullying victimisation and perpetration. There is also evidence from low- and middle-income countries that whole-school approaches can reduce child abuse by teachers and school staff.

School health services

These services are provided by a health worker (e.g., nurses) to students enrolled in primary or secondary education, either within school premises or in a health service situated outside the school that has an official agreement to provide care to students.

- **Evidence:** There is emerging evidence from the United States that these services can reduce fighting or weapon carrying among boys.

School-based sexual abuse awareness programmes

These interventions build awareness and teach skills to help children and adolescents understand consent, avoid and prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, and seek help and support. These interventions can be directed at children or parents.

- **Evidence:** This intervention can have significant impacts on risk and protective factors for violence (e.g., knowledge and protective skills). There is insufficient evidence for the impact on direct violence measures. Therefore, it remains unclear whether improvements in risk and protective factors translate to significant reductions in violence.

Life and social skills training

These programmes build skills for managing emotions and anger, pro-social behaviour, respectful relationships, and conflict resolution. Interventions can include components on gender or violence sensitisation, empowerment, self-defence training, or comprehensive sex education, among others.

- **Evidence:** Significant heterogeneity in outcomes and programme components exist within this intervention category. There is strong evidence of effectiveness for these interventions in reducing youth violence in high-income countries, whereas there is promising evidence of effectiveness in addressing intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence against adolescents in low- and middle-income countries. There is also emerging evidence of effectiveness from these interventions in addressing child maltreatment in low- and middle-income countries. There is insufficient evidence on prevention of gang involvement or violence. In high-income countries, there is strong evidence of effectiveness for Gay Straight Alliances in reducing youth violence (including against sexual minority youth) and there is promising evidence for universal mental health promotion interventions in reducing youth violence perpetration (including bullying).

School-based bullying prevention programmes

These curriculum-based programmes aim to reduce bullying (including cyberbullying) in schools by building prosocial norms, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills among students.

- **Evidence:** There is strong, consistent evidence that school-based bullying prevention programmes reduce both victimisation and perpetration of bullying and cyberbullying. Although there is evidence available from high-income countries as well as low- and middle-income countries, the evidence is stronger in high-income countries. Digital delivery for these interventions in addressing bullying and cyberbullying is supported by evidence in high-income countries only.

Healthy romantic relationships education

These interventions aim to reduce adolescent intimate partner violence through relationship skills training, healthy relationships education, and challenging harmful norms on violence or gender inequality. These interventions are most often implemented in school settings.

- **Evidence:** There is promising evidence of effectiveness in addressing intimate partner violence against adolescents from high-income countries as well as low- and middle-income countries. Evidence is inconsistent for youth violence (including sexual violence from non-intimate partners). There is inconsistent evidence of effectiveness for digital delivery of the intervention.

Intervention Type	HICs	LMICs
Whole-school approaches on bullying perpetration and victimization	✓✓	✓✓
Whole-school approaches on child abuse (by teachers or school staff)	–	✓
Comprehensive school health services on youth violence	✓	–
School-based sexual abuse awareness programmes on child sexual abuse (child-directed intervention)	✗	✗
School-based sexual abuse awareness programmes on child sexual abuse (parent-directed intervention)	✗	✗
Life and social skills training on youth violence	✓✓	✗
Life and social skills training on adolescent intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence against adolescents	✗	✓
Life and social skills training on child maltreatment	–	✓
Life and social skills training on youth violence (gang involvement or violence)	✗	–
Gay Straight Alliances on youth violence (including against sexual minority youth)	✓✓	–
Universal mental health promotion interventions on youth violence perpetration (including bullying)	✓	✗
School-based bullying prevention programmes on bullying or cyberbullying perpetration or victimization	✓✓	✓
School-based bullying prevention programmes (digital delivery) on bullying or cyberbullying perpetration or victimization	✓✓	✗
Healthy romantic relationships education on intimate partner violence against adolescents	✓	✓
Healthy romantic relationships education on youth violence (including sexual violence from non-intimate partners)	✗	✗
Healthy romantic relationships education (digital delivery) on intimate partner violence against adolescents	✗	✗

✓✓ Recommendations for prioritized implementation are well-supported or supported by evidence

✓ Recommendations for prioritized implementation have promising or emerging evidence, or are prudent

✗ Recommendations for prioritized implementation are not currently supported by evidence

– No new systematic reviews