

Interventions to prevent, reduce, and respond to violence against children and adolescents: a systematic review of systematic reviews to update the INSPIRE Framework

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Abstract Only:

Each year, one billion children globally experience violence, which carries lifelong detrimental effects. In 2016, WHO and partners launched the INSPIRE Framework: seven strategies to end violence against children. A decade after INSPIRE's development, this systematic review updates its evidence base and assesses which interventions could be prioritised for implementation. This systematic review of systematic reviews searched 152 information sources from Jan 1, 2010, to May 15, 2023, to identify systematic reviews evaluating the effectiveness of policies or interventions in addressing violence against children. Reviews were narratively synthesised and interventions were ranked using a decision matrix based on the amount and quality of evidence and the consistency of effectiveness. From 22 117 initial articles screened, 216 unique systematic reviews were included, of which 149 focused on interventions that do not have WHO implementation guidelines. Of these 149 reviews, 47 (32%) were assessed to be high or moderate confidence using the AMSTAR2 tool. Across outcome domains and countries, the strongest evidence of effectiveness includes parenting

programmes for reducing child maltreatment, safe and enabling school environments (whole-school approaches) for preventing youth violence, healthy romantic relationships education for reducing adolescent intimate partner violence, cash-plus life-skills training among adolescents in low-income and middle-income countries for reducing youth violence (including sexual violence), and cognitive behavioural therapy for children exposed to violence. Parenting programmes might also reduce maternal intimate partner violence, although few studies have directly examined this outcome. Scaling up these evidence-based approaches is essential to ending violence against children. This study was registered with PROSPERO (CRD42023427487).

Introduction

Violence against children remains a public health crisis. At least half of all children—one billion globally—experience at least one form of violence each year.¹ Violence against children (ie, those younger than 18 years) is defined as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or a group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity.”^{2, 3} The effects from violence have substantial immediate and long-term health, social, and economic consequences.⁴ Furthermore, violence exposure significantly increases the risk for future victimisation and perpetration, and thus intergenerational transmission.^{5, 6, 7} Efforts to address violence against children has substantially increased over the past decade, due in part to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, SDG Target 16.2 was introduced to address violence against children, complementing other SDG targets addressing school-based violence (4.a) and gender-based violence (5.2). The following year, the INSPIRE Framework was launched by WHO, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and eight other international partners.⁴ The INSPIRE Framework consists of seven strategies (ie, entry points) to address violence against children: implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.⁴ Each strategy includes multiple interventions (programmes or policies) with evidence for preventing, reducing, or responding to violence against children. INSPIRE provides a unified framework for collective action and is built upon three key pillars: (1) violence is

preventable; (2) priorities for prevention and response should be data driven; and (3) preventing and responding to violence should be built on evidence.

Since the launch of the INSPIRE Framework in 2016, there has been tremendous momentum in implementation, research, and policy. The number of yearly publications for interventions addressing violence against children has more than doubled from 2014–18 compared with 2010–13,⁸ and the trend continues to increase. In November, 2024, more than 100 countries gathered in Bogotá, Colombia, for the first-ever Global Ministerial Conference for Ending Violence Against Children and pledged national commitments to address violence against children. After nearly a decade of new research and policy guided by the INSPIRE Framework, it is necessary to update its evidence base so that the best science can continue to guide national and global efforts. The aim of this systematic review of systematic reviews was to incorporate new evidence into INSPIRE and to assess which programmes could be prioritised for implementation. Specifically, this systematic review of systematic reviews investigates: (1) which interventions are effective in reducing, preventing, or responding to violence against children; and (2) whether these interventions are consistently effective across contexts and should be prioritised for implementation.

Key messages

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This research systematically updates the INSPIRE Framework's evidence base on which interventions have the highest potential to effectively address violence against children (ie, child maltreatment, youth violence, adolescent intimate partner violence, and sexual violence)

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Rigorous and compelling evidence exists that preventing violence against children is possible and each INSPIRE strategy has at least one intervention with strong evidence of effectiveness

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The update to the INSPIRE Framework includes three breakthrough areas with substantial evidence of effectiveness (parenting programmes, safe and enabling school environments [whole-school approaches], and cognitive behavioural therapy for children exposed to violence), as well as other interventions with

strengthened evidence of effectiveness (life and social skills training, kinship foster care, community mobilisation, and laws limiting youth access to firearms)

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New intervention categories were added to the framework, with evidence of effectiveness for school-based bullying prevention programmes (in-person or digital delivery), cash-plus programmes (combining cash transfers with parenting programmes or youth-focused life-skills training), gay straight alliances, universal mental health promotion, welfare reform or tax credits, resettlement interventions, anti-bullying legislation, and school health services

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Whereas some intervention categories did not change in strength but still have evidence of effectiveness (healthy romantic relationships education, primary care screening and intervention, cash transfers, laws banning corporal punishment or sexual abuse and exploitation, and laws preventing problem alcohol use), the remaining intervention categories had insufficient evidence of effectiveness (in quantity or quality, or in consistent effectiveness) to support implementation

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This systematic review refines a method that can be applied to assess evidence on new, emerging interventions in efforts to indicate how programmes could be considered for prioritised implementation