Preventing violence in schools presents a unique opportunity to transform children’s experience of childhood and their future trajectories, at a relatively modest cost, especially when weighed against the significant economic gains from improved learning outcomes. Strategies being tried in different parts of the world are beginning to demonstrate positive results for both reducing violence in schools, and promoting greater gender equality between boys and girls in adulthood.

This evidence brief is based on the findings of Know Violence in Childhood – an independent global learning initiative. The Initiative makes the case for ending violence in childhood across the world. By examining existing data and commissioning new research, the Initiative has synthesized knowledge on the causes and consequences of childhood violence, and identified evidence-based strategies to prevent it.

### The scale of childhood violence

In 2015, close to 1.7 billion children in the world had experienced inter-personal violence in a previous year. This figure included 1.3 billion boys and girls who experienced corporal punishment at home, 100,000 children who were victims of homicide, 18 million adolescent girls aged 15–19 who had ever experienced sexual abuse, and 55 million adolescent girls in the same age group who had experienced physical violence since age 15.

Also in 2015, 35 per cent of 13-15 year olds worldwide reported being in a physical fight in school at least once in the past 12 months; while 39 per cent of children in the same age bracket, globally, reported being bullied at least once in the past two months, translating to 261 million 13-15 year old boys and girls who had experienced these forms of violence in a school setting.

### The multiple forms of violence against children in school

Children are exposed to violence throughout childhood, in their homes, schools and communities. As they grow old enough to start school, children are exposed to new risks. For many, schools are not just places of learning, but settings where they experience, and suffer from, violence at the hands of both their peers and adults in positions of authority.

Much of the violence in school is influenced by the overarching culture of the school and the extent to which it condones or confronts violence and abuse. A school that tolerates unjust practices signals to children that violence is acceptable, sometimes setting in train a destructive pattern of behaviour that persists throughout adult life.

### Corporal punishment by teachers

Corporal punishment in school is a ‘fact of life’ for millions of children around the world. Schoolchildren of all ages are subject to corporal punishment, although it is recorded more often at primary school. The punishment can take a variety of forms and, compared with parental corporal punishment, is more likely to involve the use of objects to beat the child. Children report that teachers hit them with rulers, yardsticks, shoes, and belts. Other forms of assault include pinching, pulling ears, pulling hair, slapping the face, and throwing objects.

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A longitudinal study across four countries found that among children aged eight, the proportion witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the previous week was over half in Peru and Viet Nam, three-quarters in Ethiopia and over nine-tenths in India. A study commissioned by Know Violence in Childhood found that schoolchildren in Uganda are at high risk of all forms of violence, particularly physical and emotional violence by school staff, peers and parents, with data from one Ugandan district revealing that 93 per cent of boys and 94 per cent of girls have ever experienced physical abuse by school staff.

Many schools that allow corporal punishment claim to reserve it for the most serious infractions. However, in a qualitative study in South Africa, children reported being beaten for not doing their homework, coming late to class, bringing cell phones to school, answering questions incorrectly, and making a noise in class. Similar findings were found in studies of schoolchildren in South Korea, Zambia, and Swaziland. In North Carolina in the United States, 48 per cent of cases of corporal punishment in schools were for disruptive behaviour and 25 per cent were for fighting or aggression.

One hundred and thirty countries have banned corporal punishment in all schools but, even in countries where it is officially banned, there is still much work to be done to educate teachers about the negative impact of corporal punishment, and alternative and positive discipline techniques so that they abandon its use. Corporal punishment continues to occur in schools throughout the world, in developed and developing countries, both where

![FIGURE 1: Emotional and physical violence is high amongst boys and girls in school, 6-19 years.](image-url)
it is legal and where it is banned. Legislative reform, advocacy, awareness and training are each needed so that children can attend school without fear of violence at the hands of school personnel.

Physical and emotional violence perpetrated by students

Students are the second most common perpetrators of all physical and emotional violence against other children (after household members). Globally, between 70 per cent of all boys and 80 per cent of girls aged 8 to about 11 years have experienced emotional violence from a fellow student in the past year. (FIGURE 1) For 12–17 year olds, the prevalence is about 50 per cent.

Levels of physical violence experienced by students in the past year are also high. About 40 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys in the age-group 8 to 11 experienced physical violence from a fellow student in the past 12 months.

Bullying (including cyber bullying)

The extent of bullying in schools varies considerably between global regions. Across the industrialized countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and Pacific, and in Eastern Europe, nearly one child in three reported being bullied at school at least once in the past two months. Across Africa, almost every other child reported having being bullied.

There are, however, wide variations within regions. The Middle East and North Africa, for example, includes Morocco, which had one of the lowest rates of bullying, but also Egypt, which had one of the highest. (TABLE 1)

Bullying is defined as ‘intentional and repeated aggression via physical, verbal, relational or cyber forms in which the targets cannot defend themselves’. Bullying is typically a strategy children use to resolve conflicts when they are not aware of other peaceful means to do so. Children may be bullies, victims or bully-victims – that is, children who are both victimized and bully others. Analysis of the determinants of bullying indicates that those who are bullied are more likely to have also bullied others than those who are not bullied. The impacts too are the same for those who bully and are bullied: they are more likely to report injury and a lower academic achievement than those who do not report such abuse.

Cyber or online bullying is an increasingly documented phenomenon, which can take many forms. These include “flaming” (an online fight); “bash boards” (online bulletin boards where people can post malicious messages); “outing” (when someone publishes confidential or private information online); trickery (when a person purposely tricks another person into telling secrets and it is published online); exclusion (intentionally excluding someone from an online group); “happy slapping” (when a victim is physically attacked, the incident is filmed and distributed electronically); text wars or attacks (ganging up on the victim, sending the target hundreds of emails or text messages); online polls (asking readers to vote on hurtful questions); and “griefing” (chronically

TABLE 1: Countries with lowest and highest rates of bullying in schools, 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries with lowest rates of bullying</th>
<th>Percentage of children</th>
<th>Countries with highest rates of bullying</th>
<th>Percentage of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

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causing grief to people online). Digital violence may also take the form of phone or email harassment, harassment on social networks and making objectionable videos for “sextortion”.

Some of the unique characteristics of online violence include the permanency of the digital footprint, the capacity to remain an anonymous aggressor, the sheer scale of a viral offence, and the potential for online violence to permeate all the spheres and spaces in which young people live their lives. These amplified forms of violence are likely to lead to distinct impacts and harm which are as yet not fully understood.

Qualitative research provides useful clues to understanding differences across contexts and cultures. In Egypt, for instance, reports suggest that cyber bullying is on the rise. To appeal to boys, girls may send them their nude pictures; boys may then blackmail girls into doing things they do not want to do, or post personal pictures online to humiliate them. Cyber bullying occurs between girls as well. In the case of where a girl has a fall out with a friend, she might post online personal pictures of her, say from a sleepover or a pool party, in order to cause embarrassment.14

Sexual violence among school-age children

Evidence on the experience of sexual violence among school-age children varies across countries. In high-income countries, dating violence is the most commonly reported form of intimate partner violence. Dating violence refers to physical or sexual violence that occurs in a relationship that is neither marriage nor a long-term dating relationship.

Research, mostly from Europe and North America, suggests that adolescents start dating between 13-15 years. In the United States, 72 per cent of 13-16 year old adolescents have had dating experience, whereas in the United Kingdom 88 per cent of adolescents over 15 years report having dating experience.15 The evidence on violence faced in such relationships, and who faces it though is unclear. However in another study in Quebec, Canada, girls were more likely to report experiences of psychological, physical, threatening behaviours as well as sexual dating victimization than boys.16

In middle- and low-income countries, adolescent girls are at great risk of sexual violence in intimate relationships which they enter on account of early marriage, as a result of which they also drop out of school. As noted earlier, in 2015 nearly 18 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 reported having faced sexual violence at any point in their childhoods. A large proportion of such acts of abuse occur within the boundaries of marriage and are therefore sanctioned by law, in most countries, and by society. There are regional variations though, with sexual violence against girls being the highest in countries in Africa – where between 35-45 per cent adolescent girls report having faced sexual abuse – and South Asia where on average about 30 per cent girls talk about such abuse. These are also regions with the highest rates of child marriages.17

Finally, there is limited data on sexual violence perpetrated by teachers. There are few surveys available on the extent of such violence. For example, a survey conducted by the American Association of University Women in 2000 found that sexual harassment is pervasive – nearly 38 per cent of the 2,064 students interviewed from grade 8 to 11 said that they had been sexually harassed by their teachers or school employees.18 More research is required on this particular form of abuse.

What increases the risk of exposure to sexual violence? Witnessing domestic violence at home appears to be a significant risk factor. A study covering nearly 400 victims of domestic violence and their adolescent children in North Carolina, United States, found that the prevalence of dating violence was higher among them than among children who did not witness violence against their mothers.19

In many countries, the practice of early marriage and the intimate partner violence that may follow it are driven by social norms that valorize both the protection of girls’ chastity and the importance of minimizing the dishonour associated with improper female sexual conduct. Girls are often married early because of pressure from parents and relatives, poverty, the practice of dowry, perceptions or real concerns regarding the lack of safety, and lack of aspirational or real alternatives to marriage and childbearing. Limited access to quality education and families’ prioritization of boys’ rather than girls’ education – in part because of limited job opportunities later in life – contribute to perpetuate the practice.


Available at: https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf.

Individual characteristics also affect the risk children face of becoming victims of such abuse. Research suggests that children belonging to ethnic or sexual minorities, and those with disabilities, can be especially vulnerable to bullying with sexual connotations. Data reviewed for a 2016 UNESCO report consistently show that a high proportion of students in countries which collect data are affected by homophobic and transphobic violence in school, and that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students are more likely to experience such violence at school than at home or in the community, largely involving psychological abuse, including social exclusion and verbal bullying. For example, one study in the United Kingdom found that between 30 and 50 per cent of adolescents in secondary schools, who were attracted to the same sex, experienced homophobic bullying. In the 2011 National School Climate Survey conducted in the United States, which covered a nationally representative sample of over 8,500 LGBT students between the ages of 13 and 20 years, 82 per cent of respondents said they had been verbally harassed at school, such as being called names or threatened, in the past year because of their sexual orientation; over one-third reported that such abuse occurred frequently. In fact, one of the reasons why boys may be afraid to report being abused sexually by other boys is the fear that they would be labelled as homosexual.

### Consequences of school violence

Violence against children has long-term consequences. To begin with, children with a history of maltreatment experience show impairments in mental well-being – in the form of anxiety, low mood, aggression, social skills deficits and poor inter-personal relationships – that affect academic performance. While there is no evidence that corporal punishment promotes learning, there is conversely substantial evidence linking it with physical harm, mental and behavioural health problems, and impaired educational and developmental achievement. A study in Jamaica shows that while exposure to violence does not directly impact children’s school achievement, it indirectly impacts achievement through suppressing intellectual functioning. This suggests that children exposed to violence are unlikely to develop their full intellectual potential, and this in turn suppresses academic achievement.

Children who fear being physically harmed by their teachers tend to dislike or avoid school. One study which followed the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam over 15 years found that the most important reason for students not liking, and not attending, school was corporal punishment.

Adolescents who are bullied miss more school and show signs of poorer school achievement than those who are not bullied. They are also likely to report higher levels of loneliness, poor health, and greater levels of anxiety and depression. Studies have also linked the experiences of victims to suicidal thoughts. Bullying harms the bully and the bullied alike – both of whom can have significantly lower academic achievement and poorer health than children not involved in this type of violence.

For child brides, the impact is much worse. Despite wanting to attend school, they are pulled out and lose the opportunity to get educated and earn in the long term. Many of them are forced to enter sexual relationships and bear significant health risks when giving birth at a young age. According to World Bank and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) estimates, child marriage is the likely cause of 3 in 4 girls having children before the age of 18; it greatly reduces the likelihood of girls completing secondary education; it reduces the future earnings of child brides by 9 per cent (than if girls were married later); and decreases the decision-making ability that child brides may have in their new household, thereby increasing the risk of violence.

Children can experience inter-personal violence in many interconnected ways that spill across settings, from homes to schools to communities, and through the years of childhood. Many experience more than one form of violence. A child may also be subject to “poly-victimization”. For instance, children who

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School violence can have severe economic consequences as well. Some costs are straightforward and relate directly to the abuse, like direct medical treatment, special education, psychological and welfare services, and protective services. To illustrate, children who face injuries in physical fights or those who are physically attacked by their peers at school need treatment, which implies a direct cost on the healthcare system. Incidents that are formally reported also imply costs to the judicial system, and to the child protection system, which needs to invest then both in school helplines to track such incidents, and also offer recourse mechanisms to victims.

A second set of costs is relatively harder to calculate, as it requires an estimation of future productivity losses. Children who are absent or who drop out of school on account of abuse are less likely to complete their education or get a good job. This results in a loss of productivity in terms of the economic value they could have added to society in their lifetime. Using this approach, estimates show that violence against children is likely to cost the world nearly $7 trillion in economic value lost.\(^{33}\) This estimate of course includes the future impact of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children in all settings, not just at school.

Unless violence is prevented, it may also greatly dilute the value of investments that governments, donors and multilaterals make in education. Making investments in preventing violence that start early in a child’s life can have long-term, intergenerational effects. A cost-benefit analysis of the well-known High Scope Perry Preschool Program shows a return of $16.14 per dollar invested. By age 40, the African-American children who participated in the preschool programme as 3-4 year olds had significantly fewer arrests for violent crime, drug felonies and violent misdemeanors, and served fewer months in prison compared to non-participants.\(^{33}\)

### Strategies to prevent and reduce violence

Schools can be sites where children ‘unlearn’ violence, and acquire positive behavioural skills. Preventing the drop out of girls from secondary school is a proven key strategy for reducing sexual violence, as it reduces early marriage and exposure to intimate partner violence. There are also many proven approaches that demonstrate how schools can effectively contribute to ending all forms of violence both in school, as well as more broadly, in society.

The “whole-school” approach

Eliminating violence at school requires the support not just of teachers and the education sector, but also the involvement of families, children, and community members. The overall aim should be to change school culture, addressing the interpersonal space between adults and children, and creating viable alternative models for adult–child relationships. This can both prevent violence and also improve children’s learning, health, economic and social outcomes.

Schools and other institutions should be centres of non-violence that foster a sense of belonging for students, and discourage hierarchies that condone violent behaviour and bullying throughout the cycle of schooling, starting from the earliest years. Central to this are teachers’ capacities to foster inclusive and non-violent cultures in the classroom.

The “whole-school” approach treats violence as a symptom of a disturbed ecosystem and aims for equilibrium through interventions targeted at students, parents, teachers and classrooms, using a variety of methods including student lessons and meetings. One well-tested example of an effective whole-school programme is the Good School Toolkit.\(^{34}\) Developed by a Ugandan non-profit organization, the Toolkit aims to reduce corporal punishment using extensive staff training and classroom activities.

The Toolkit methodology enables leaders to create a school-wide culture where violence is not tolerated and generates opportunities for students to participate in the decision-making processes.
that affect them. Through colourful and accessible learning materials, the Toolkit offers ideas for a range of activities that facilitate learning about gender, sexuality, disability, positive discipline and creating violence-free classrooms. Those leading the process engage the entire school and the surrounding community in a reflection about what is a good school, what is a good teacher, and how students learn to participate. The overall aim is to foster egalitarian relationships and a safer psychological environment within which students are likely to invest in their school, form attachments to their teachers, identify with their peers, and develop a sense of belonging.

A rigorous evaluation of the Toolkit found that schools that implemented the Toolkit saw a 42 per cent reduction in the number of students who reported they had been victims of violence from school staff. Students expressed greater attachment to their school and there was a positive effect on students’ feelings of safety and overall well-being at school. There was no effect on test scores, however, although educational performance did not deteriorate. It is possible because the latter is likely to be affected by a range of factors, including factors outside of the school, for example socio-economic and familial factors, which the Toolkit cannot influence. Also, most of the schools involved in the project in Uganda, faced large structural issues related to poverty, for example, large class sizes, poor physical infrastructure, and lack of resources for teaching. Although students felt safer in intervention schools, it might be that improving the atmosphere at school was necessary but not sufficient to improve outcomes such as educational performance in the short-term of the evaluation. Overall, however, the approach appears cost-effective and scalable, even in resource-poor countries.

A curriculum that combats violence

Children have been described as “wired for violence” as part of the human instinct for survival. They are not born with the skills to control themselves, to reason on the best course of action when they are upset, or to get along with each other in a non-violent manner. These skills have to be learned from an early age, and the curriculum needs to prioritize them. Central to the school curriculum should be “Social-Emotional Learning”. Social-Emotional Learning has come to be recognized as a “core set of social and emotional skills that help children more effectively handle life challenges and thrive in both their learning and their social environments”. Early childhood is the period of most rapid brain development, when experiences determine which channels of the brain are formed. Repeated experiences make these channels stronger and stronger, and channels that are not used fade away. Experiences of love and affection wire channels for emotions, but so do experiences of anger and aggression. It is critical that the school curriculum provides loving and nurturing interactions and minimizes the experiences that cause aggression and violence. To survive and to get along with others, children have to develop executive function and self-regulation.

Curricula developed in the United States and elsewhere, such as the Incredible Years programme published in 1984, have demonstrated significant results in addressing conduct problems in disadvantaged and high-risk children. The programme focuses on strategies teachers can use to promote learning, social-emotional competence and good behaviour, aiming to improve the effectiveness of teaching and the warmth and productiveness of teacher-child interactions. Evaluations and follow-up studies have shown that training early childhood teachers in behaviour-management skills not only reduced corporal punishment, but also benefited children’s mental health, executive function, school achievement and school attendance. In Jamaica, the programme has been adapted for children aged 3–5 in basic schools as the Irie School Kit. This has four modules that aim to create emotionally supportive classroom environments, manage child behaviour, promote social and emotional competence, and behaviour planning.

Preventing bullying

In several countries, it is legally required that schools have an anti-bullying policy. This obligation is desirable, but simply having a policy in place is unlikely to be enough; schools should be provided with guidance regarding most effective practices and programmes. Interventions that have been

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found to be effective through rigorous evaluations should be utilized. A system of accrediting effective anti-bullying programmes should be developed in order to ensure that programmes adopted by schools contain elements that have been proved to be effective in high-quality evaluations.41

Research has demonstrated that peer witnesses’ responses are crucial to inhibit or fuel bullying. Whether bystanders mobilize to intervene, or are silent witnesses to acts of bullying is key to the success of anti-bullying programmes. Some highly effective programmes, such as the KiVa anti-bullying programme42 developed in Finland, rely on enhancing bystanders’ awareness, empathy and self-efficacy to support victimized peers, instead of implicitly or explicitly reinforcing the bullies’ behaviour.43

Many countries implement anti-bullying programmes in schools with varying results. Lessons from reviews of such programmes show that for effective and sustained results, programmes should be intensive and long-lasting, and they should be implemented consistently. Involving parents strengthens the effects, as does the use of positive disciplinary practices with bullies. Raising awareness among students about the role of the whole group has an impact on bullying, and enhancing anti-bullying norms and responses within classrooms is crucial. It is also important that teachers clearly communicate their anti-bullying attitudes to students.

Preventing corporal punishment

The United Nations has called on countries to ban corporal punishment in all settings, including schools. Legal bans on school corporal punishment are welcome but not sufficient to completely eliminate it. True behavioural change by teachers and school administrators will require education about the harms of corporal punishment and about alternative, positive forms of discipline.

Ending school corporal punishment will require educating the public about harms of corporal punishment, instituting appropriate sanctions for continued use of corporal punishment by school personnel, monitoring compliance with bans, creating procedures for students, parents, or staff to report use of corporal punishment, and instructing teachers in alternative methods of discipline. Advocacy and public education campaigns that combine the efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies are needed to raise awareness about the harms of corporal punishment among teachers, parents, and children.44

ActionAid’s Stop Violence Against Girls in School45 programme has been implemented in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique over a six-year period and has yielded significant results. This is a multi-level intervention designed to reduce violence across multiple settings, including schools, through a combination of advocacy and education about topics such as the importance of gender equity and the harms of corporal punishment. In all three countries, more students and teachers subsequently agreed that teachers should not whip students, and fewer girls reported experiencing corporal punishment in school. The programme also improved enrolment and reduced dropout. However, teachers reported that they were not given instruction in alternative modes of discipline – which they would have found useful.

Ensuring online safety

Strengthening children’s capacities to use the internet to their advantage – in an age-appropriate way – can be an important way to engage them in minimizing risks and preventing exposure to abuse. Encouraging safety online is partly a matter of increasing the capacities of parents and teachers. Those who are technologically literate are in a good position to protect and supervise children.

Online systems represent the potential to proactively promote children’s safety, on and offline. For example, Young Africa Live46 is an online forum that gives girls and women an anonymous space to talk freely about sexual issues. Similarly, HarassMap47 in Egypt and Township Mamas48 in South Africa, are technological systems that enable girls and women to create and map alerts about rape incidents. Also in South Africa, rapes are being recorded and published online by boys, helping to raise awareness among male students about rape prevention.

After-school programmes for at-risk children

At-risk children – for example, those who live in communities where there are high levels of

46 See www.youngafricalive.com
gang violence – can benefit from after-school programmes that address underachievement, behavioural problems and socio-emotional functioning. Fourteen studies from six Latin American countries reported on the benefits of after-school programmes, the extension of school day initiatives, and extracurricular activities. These benefits arose partly because adolescents had less time to engage in risky behaviours – such as anti-social behaviour, hazardous alcohol consumption and crime – if they were engaged in after-school activities. Further, they could use this time to develop essential skills. After-school programmes and activities typically include topics such as drugs and crime, but they can also motivate adolescents with activities around culture, arts and citizenship. The most successful programmes ensure parental involvement.\(^{49}\)

In Colombia, youth clubs contribute to social risk reduction, lower crime indices, a better handling of free time and preventing the abuse of illegal substances. The full day school reform increased the amount of time that students spent in school by almost 22 per cent. Operationally, this change meant an increase in the number of hours spent under adult supervision, as students were required to remain on school grounds until 4:00 pm (compared to 1:00 pm under the previous system). Longer school days can help reduce crime, and the effect is significant: an increase of 20 percentage points in full school coverage in the municipality reduced the juvenile crime rate between 11 and 24 per cent, depending on the crime category.

Programa de Jornada Escolar Complementaria\(^{54}\) (Complementary School Day) is another example of an extracurricular programme aimed at low-income children in vulnerable populations affected by crime, drug consumption and violence. Those who took part in the programme had better citizenship skills, improved self-esteem, participation and tolerance. Also, teachers identified spillover effects towards the community, noticing a decrease in the number of parental complaints about student behaviour, and a better relationship between parents and teachers.

In Brazil, Abriendo Espacios\(^{52}\) (Opening Places, now called Escuelas Abiertas – Open Schools) showed similar positive achievements in terms of reducing violence in Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco. School fights, bad behaviour by students, vandalism and personal humiliations diminished. Also, the intervention fostered community participation in school problems, and positive relationships between students, and between students and instructors.

Ensuring that girls remain in school
One of the best ways to reduce sexual violence against girls, is to keep girls in secondary schools, and thereby end the practice of child marriage. In other words, the school can become an important pivot around which interventions to prevent sexual violence can be structured. Recent World Bank and ICRW analyses suggest that each year of secondary education is likely to reduce girls’ likelihood of marrying and entering into sexually abusive relationships by five percentage points or more in many countries.\(^{53}\) This realization has led donors including the World Bank and DFID to commit significantly more resources to girls’ education. In 2016 for instance, the World Bank Group pledged that it would invest $2.5 billion over five years in education projects that directly benefit adolescent girls. DFID’s Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) similarly is helping up to a million of the world’s poorest girls improve their lives through education by disbursing nearly 300 million pounds to 37 education projects across 18 countries. Governments on their part are also offering incentives to parents to keep girls in school. For example, India which has the highest number of child brides in the world, has witnessed one of the largest declines in child marriage rates, from nearly 50 per cent to 27 per cent over the last decade.\(^{44}\)

Costs of interventions to address school violence
Very few evaluations of violence-prevention programmes provide evidence regarding the costs of such programmes. A recent study estimates how much it would cost to implement the Good School Toolkit programme.\(^{58}\) Using a cluster randomized control trial approach, it finds that the total cost of setting up and running the Toolkit over the 18-month trial period is US$397,233, excluding process-monitoring activities. The cost to run the intervention is US$7,429 per school annually,\(^{59}\)
or US$15 per primary school pupil annually, in the trial intervention schools. The study also finds that the intervention averted 1,620 cases of past-week physical violence during its 18-month implementation period.

The total cost per case of violence averted is US$244, and the annual implementation cost is US$96 per case averted during the trial. Direct comparison of cost-effectiveness results is not feasible since the Good School Toolkit was the first intervention of its kind that has been evaluated via randomized controlled trial. However, it is useful to compare results with other violence prevention and reduction programmes in the region, even if the outcome measures used and the time period over which benefits are measured are different. A trial for SASA! – a programme to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) against women – for example found that the total estimated cost per case of past-year IPV averted was US$485.15. Similarly, another trial of the Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity tested the Sisters for Life intervention to prevent IPV and strengthen gender equity, plus microfinance, in South Africa. It reported an estimate of US$891 per year free of IPV.62 The Good School Toolkit compares favourably against these two interventions when compared on the cost per case of violence averted (US$244).

What the trial of the Good School Toolkit shows is that the cost to deliver such a programme is not necessarily high, as elements of the programme can be integrated into existing policies and systems. Behavioural interventions can be introduced easily and at low cost in teacher training and the school management framework, and in the school curriculum. These can be reviewed periodically, along with encouraging values such as empathy in after-school clubs and so on.

**Recommendations**

School violence has a big impact on children’s educational attainment, mental and physical well-being, and ability to meet their potential as functioning, non-violent adults. Moreover, schools are crucially important settings where early patterns of violent behaviour in children can be disrupted through cost-effective interventions. Addressing violence in schools should therefore be a policy and programmatic priority, and given increased attention and resources.

To start with, a violence-prevention agenda for schools needs a strong evidence and knowledge base. This requires better data on a range of indicators such as the form of violence (emotional, physical, sexual violence perpetrated through incidents of bullying, physical fights, physical attacks, dating, sexual solicitation, or cyber bullying); age at which incident occurs; place where it occurs (in school or on way to school or both); frequency of violence; consequences of violence (nature of injury, psychological impact); whether the respondent is a victim or perpetrator; the identity of the perpetrator (for example violence perpetrated by teachers), etc. Some surveys already in the field such as the Demographic Health Surveys, UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, the Global School-based Student Health Survey and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey can go a step further and capture these variables along with the risk factors associated with school violence. For example, prior history of violence; drug, alcohol or tobacco abuse; association with delinquent peers; poor grades in school; poor family functioning; and so on.

Second, schools need to integrate violence-prevention, not through narrow programmes, but through broader, inclusive strategies that target all actors and all forms of violence across all grades. Violence-prevention and response should be an element of all education sector plans, programmes and interventions.

Third, school-based violence prevention strategies cannot operate in isolation. They should be linked with pupils’ families and the wider community, through school governance mechanisms, as well as with the wider child protection mechanisms provided by health and social welfare services.

Finally, violence in schools needs to be made more visible. Children spend a substantial part of their childhood in schools, and governments across the world pour billions of dollars in school education as part of broader human development commitments. It is critical, therefore, that schools are safe places for children and centres of non-violence; where violence against children is prevented and properly addressed. To achieve this, it is important that public action helps to break the silence around violence against children.

Violence needs to be spoken about, revealing the magnitude of the problem and its adverse consequences, while building awareness, educating the public, and initiating public debate. This is crucial if governments want to ensure that their investments in school education are fully secured through the promotion of learning environments that are free of violence, abuse and fear.


Every day millions of boys and girls around the world experience fear and violence – physical, emotional or sexual. This need not happen. Violence in childhood is preventable – through concerted and collective action that addresses the root causes of violence and lays firm foundations for both sustainable development and more peaceful societies.

To fulfill the commitments to ending all forms of violence that are enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, states and societies must analyze the causes of childhood violence, and invest in preventing violence against women and children.