Research in Brief:
Effectiveness of School-Bullying Prevention Programs

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Background

School-bullying is defined as any aggressive behaviour that has: 1) intention to harm; 2) repetition; and 3) clear power imbalance between the bully and the victim. In a study with data from across 80 countries (Modecki et al., 2014), the prevalence for bullying perpetration and bullying victimization was found to be 34.5% and 36%, respectively.

Bullying is associated with negative long-term effects for all those involved, not just the victim. For example, some studies show that bullies are more likely to report substance use, suicidal ideation, and criminal activity later in life. Victims are more likely to report poor mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. Bullying prevention programs play an important role in reducing these negative life outcomes. As such, reviewing the effectiveness of these prevention programs is an important matter to inform future public health and crime prevention initiatives.

What is a systematic review and meta-analysis?

A systematic review is a type of study that exhaustively summarizes the literature on a specific research question, in order to draw a collective conclusion that provides stronger evidence than any single study. This research method involves: 1) framing a specific research question; 2) running a comprehensive search in the literature; 3) screening the retrieved articles for relevance; 4) assessing the research quality of the relevant articles; 5) abstracting results from the relevant articles; and 6) synthesizing the results of the relevant articles to draw a conclusion. A meta-analysis then

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Why does this matter?

⇒ School-bullying is highly prevalent among children and adolescents, and it is associated with negative mental, physical, and social outcomes for both perpetrators and victims

⇒ Anti-bullying interventions have been widely implemented to address bullying in schools

⇒ Synthesized research on the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs can help inform future school decisions and policies

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The Effectiveness of School-Bullying Prevention Programs

combines the statistical results of the relevant articles to provide a pooled estimate of effects.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate how effective school-based prevention programs were at reducing bullying perpetration and bullying victimization.

The study participants were between the ages of 4 and 18 years. Peer-reviewed studies were retrieved from electronic databases, including Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, DARE, and ProQuest. Eligible studies: 1) evaluated a school-based anti-bullying program; 2) included an adequate definition of school-bullying; 3) quantitatively measured school-bullying perpetration and/or victimization; and 4) used an experimental or quasi-experimental design with a control group to make comparisons.

Studies needed to be published between 2009 and December 2016. Additionally, studies were excluded if the interventions targeted alternative forms of bullying (i.e. cyber-bullying), general aggression, general school violence, or if the study included juvenile delinquents or clinical samples as participants.

What did they learn?

In total, 474 articles out of approximately 20,000 articles were eligible for the systematic review. Of these 474 articles, 100 had data suitable for aggregation in the meta-analysis. It was found that anti-bullying interventions significantly reduced both bullying perpetration and bullying victimization.

Students who received an anti-bullying intervention were less likely to report engaging in bullying compared to participants who did not receive the intervention. Similarly, students who received an intervention were less likely to report instances of being bullied in comparison to participants who did not receive the intervention.

Overall, bullying perpetration was reduced by 19-20% and bullying victimization was reduced by 15-16% among those that received an anti-bullying intervention compared to control groups that did not.

A key limitation of this systematic review and meta-analysis is the absence of additional analyses that explore the effectiveness of specific intervention components. Nonetheless, a previous review (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) found that parent training programs and playground supervision were significantly correlated with larger reductions in bullying perpetration.

Ttofi & Farrington (2011) also found that videos, disciplinary methods, and cooperative group work represented components that were associated with larger reductions in bullying victimization. For both bullying perpetration and bullying victimization, it was found that intervention of higher intensity and longer duration were more successful.

Results should be interpreted with caution due to high heterogeneity in the outcomes across included studies. Nevertheless, the authors maintain that anti-bullying programs aid in reducing bullying in schools. Future research is necessary to investigate the effectiveness of specific components and mechanisms of bullying prevention programs. This would contribute to a richer understanding of how to develop and evaluate effective school-based bullying interventions.

Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.

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