State of the Evidence

Description of the Evidence

Children who face physical violence at school, in the form of corporal punishment from teachers or peer violence from other students, may face a variety of negative consequences of such violence. In addition to the physical and mental consequences of violence, children may be less able to learn effectively if they experience or believe they may experience violence at school. There is broad agreement on the critical importance of safeguarding children though there is limited experimental research on the most effective approaches to best protect children from violence in schools. In the absence of a large body of rigorous research, descriptive data and guidance from practitioners may provide education systems with key principles to guide the design of violence prevention programs.

One randomized evaluation example comes from Turkey (Alan et al. 2020), where an interactive classroom program encouraging students to consider one another’s perspectives lowered peer violence (by 1.23 incidents of peer violence in a 10-day period) in addition to improving relationships between refugee and Turkish students and increased prosocial behaviors like trust, cooperation, and altruism.

Additionally, the World Health Organization, in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO has a practical handbook (WHO 2019) for schools and policymakers on ways to incorporate violence prevention strategies into existing school routines. More resources on the Unicef website provide technical guidance, case studies, diagnostic tools, and other materials to support the creation and implementation of programs to keep children safe in school. The World Bank report, “Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case,” is another resource which outlines promising approaches to reduce school-violence, especially in the wake of Covid-19.

For evidence relating to children who live in unsafe environments that may affect their travel to school, please see the memo on “Reducing travel time.”

Notes on Context

In contexts where corporal punishment for children is more common or more widely accepted, it may be more difficult to prevent such practices from occurring in the classroom. In contexts experiencing inter-ethnic conflict or other types of conflicts, preventing peer violence may be especially important but also especially difficult.

Equity Considerations

Children from certain ethnic groups or other marginalized groups may be more likely to experience violence at school. It is therefore particularly important to ensure that any measures you take to safeguard children from violence protect all children, especially those who may be experiencing more violence at school than those in the majority groups.
Operationalization

Research Questions

Below are open research questions on this topic. This list is not exhaustive but rather is illustrative of the types of questions that will help education actors make more evidence-based decisions. Education actors interested in implementing programs in this category may want to consider including a randomized evaluation alongside implementation to (1) understand the impacts of the program, and (2) add to the global knowledge base.

- What are key drivers of violence in school?
- How can schools incorporate safeguarding techniques into existing routines and processes?
- What are effective behavioral interventions that can protect children from violence in school?
- What are broader policy changes that education systems can implement to protect children from violence in school?
- What is the linkage between safeguarding and learning outcomes?

Successful Example

Building Inter-Ethnic Cohesion in Schools in Turkey (Alan et al. 2020)

Further Action Options

For approaches with limited evidence of effectiveness in the literature, more evidence generation is recommended to close evidence gaps. Based on the evidence for this category, potential next steps might include:

- Connecting with researchers to identify relevant open questions that would benefit from further research;
- Other activities to think through the research needs of this evidence in your context.

If you are interested in exploring these or other options, please contact the J-PAL Education team at JPAL_Education@povertyactionlab.org, to set up an initial exploratory meeting. The team will be happy to brainstorm potential next steps.