



# ENDING VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: AN INVESTMENT CASE – SELECTED FINDINGS

Quentin Wodon, Chloë Fèvre, Chata Malé,  
Ada Nayihouba, and Hoa Nguyen

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Safe to Learn



End Violence  
Against Children



WORLD BANK GROUP  
Education



# INTRODUCTION

How do you decide what part of a child's life to invest in? Should it be education or human rights? Gender equality or nutrition? What if it didn't have to be an either-or decision? The reality is that a child's life cannot be divided into parts. Investing in one area will unquestionably benefit the others. But introduce violence into the equation and all other efforts become restrained. Violence in and around schools jeopardizes a child's chances to develop and reach their full potential. This brief will give you the data and evidence to take a step further and act. It is based on a comprehensive study commissioned by the Safe to Learn Global Initiative<sup>1</sup> and undertaken by the World Bank: *Ending violence in Schools: An Investment Case*<sup>2</sup>. The full analysis, methodological explanations and references can be found in the main report. This version highlights the main findings.

In our fast-paced and ever-shifting world, one fact remains constant: human capital is the vital force behind economic development. The sum of knowledge, health, competencies and capabilities acquired throughout a person's life is what drives societies forward. But violence in and around schools has the power to derail this. On any given day, a child will be hurt at school, or threatened on the way there. They may face bullying in class or online. They may have to provide "favors" in exchange for a ride to school or face such relentless ridicule that their self-esteem struggles to recover. These are real issues experienced by girls and boys trying to go to school to learn. Whether in Cambodia or Egypt, Uganda or Australia, no country in the world is spared from violence in and around schools.

**While there is no doubt that education is transformative, simply going to school is not enough.** Real learning, the process of receiving and distilling information, of thinking and creating and producing and socializing, is less likely to happen if a child is scared or traumatized. Preventing violence in and through school is therefore a prerequisite for girls and boys getting the education they need and deserve, and acquiring the skills, knowledge and values that provide the foundations for strong and inclusive societies.

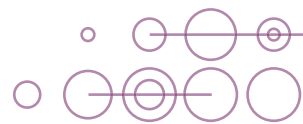
This report demonstrates that **violence in and around schools negatively impacts educational outcomes, and society pays a heavy price as a result. Cost-benefit analyses suggest that implementing interventions to prevent violence in and through schools from early childhood to secondary education is a smart economic investment.** Rigorously evaluated programs and policies aimed at preventing violence at different levels of the education system show that action is feasible. The benefits of investing in preventing violence in and through schools is likely to far outweigh the costs.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a wrench at efforts to end violence against children. While children were out of school, violence at home and in the community took a toll. Learning was affected with **girls disproportionately at risk of dropping out and, as a result, marry as children with all the implications this entails**<sup>3</sup>. Many boys had to work to help support families who lost income due to the pandemic. But as countries reopen schools, the issue of violence in school must be tackled.

**The Education World Forum has called on us to "build forward together [and make education] stronger, bolder, and better" for all children following the global pandemic; we as the global community need to make it safer too.** In fact, "*stronger means safer*."<sup>4</sup> No child should have to choose between safety and learning. Ensuring that violence prevention becomes a cornerstone of education systems also means that gender equality, racial equity, and inclusion are built into new plans. This is what the Safe to Learn Global Initiative commits itself and its partners to doing in its new 2021-2024 Strategy.<sup>5</sup> This powerful coalition of partners need you as parents, caregivers, teachers, presidents, ministers of education, ministers of finance, funders of education, partners and practitioners, to join forces to eradicate violence in and around schools so that children's rights are respected. It is time to act.

<sup>1</sup>The Safe to Learn Global Initiative was created following a Youth Manifesto to End Violence in and through Schools that called for the international community to prioritize violence prevention in the education sector and ensure that all girls and boys are safe to learn to reach their full potentials. The Safe to Learn Coalition includes 14 powerful partners from the education, violence prevention, child protection, and health communities, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK FCDO), the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI), the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children, the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Global Business Coalition for Education, Global Affairs Canada, the World Health Organization, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.





# THE URGENT CASE FOR PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN AND THROUGH SCHOOLS

One of the most pervasive challenges with violence in and around schools (VIAS) is its normalization. Because it can take different forms in different contexts, it may not always be immediately recognizable. Sometimes we don't see it, sometimes we accept it, and sometimes we even justify it. We know that VIAS has a direct impact on students and teachers. What is often less obvious is the insidious effect it has on society. It can tear at the fabric of communities and undermine government and funder efforts to give children a safe and comprehensive learning experience.

If we are serious about giving violence prevention the priority it deserves, we need to get to the root of the problem. Violence is not only multifaceted, it is multicausal. Its manifestation results from the accumulation of risk factors within the family, the community, the school and society at large. It has been argued that at the root of much of VIAS is a patriarchal system that allows for the use and abuse of power over others. It is often an invisible mechanism built on exploitation that drives a range of behaviors and attitudes from the personal to the political and sustains all types of discrimination. As such, any effort to prevent VIAS needs to be gender transformative and inclusive if we are to make significant progress on achieving SDGS 4, 5 and 16.2 by 2030.

## FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Violence can be **sexual, emotional and/or physical**. VIAS includes:

- **Bullying** is repeated aggressive behavior among students or between a child and an adult and is among the most common forms of violence in school settings.
- **Online violence/cyberbullying** is bullying that takes place via electronic means such as by SMS, text, or online. This has become a serious challenge that schools, educators and parents must grapple with.
- **Corporal punishment** includes any punishment in which physical force is used, however light, as well as cruel and degrading non-physical forms of punishment.
- **Intimate partner violence (IPV)** is a form of domestic violence that refers to any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm.
- **Dating violence** is violence by one person against another in an unmarried couple who are romantically linked. It can be sexual, physical and emotional. It is considered a form of IPV and VIAS.
- **Gender-based violence (GBV)** refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical or emotional violence springing from beliefs that reinforce unequal gender norms.

Some children may be especially at risk of violence in and around schools if they are perceived to be different from others. This can include girls; children from marginalized groups; children with disabilities; those from ethnic, racial or religious minorities; LGBTQ children; and those from indigenous groups.<sup>6</sup> Some studies suggest a link between violence against non-gender conforming students and suicidal behavior.<sup>7</sup> Girls and boys who live in conflict and fragility settings are also particularly vulnerable to violence. In some cases, conflicts involve attacks on schools.<sup>8</sup> Children who are refugees or internally displaced are at very high risk of falling behind in their education.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Wodon, Q., C. Fèvre, C. Male, A. Nayihouba, and H. Nguyen. 2021. Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case. Washington, DC: World Bank and Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.<sup>3</sup>Wodon, Q., C. Montenegro, H. Nguyen, and A. Onagoruwa. 2018. Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls. The Cost of Not Educating Girls Notes Series. Washington, DC: The World Bank. <sup>4</sup>Interview with Gavin Dykes, Program Director of the Education World Forum and Global Expert of Education Policies, July 2021. <sup>5</sup>The Safe to Learn Strategy is available at: <https://www.end-violence.org/safe-to-learn>. It provides a collective methodology to support countries reach critical benchmarks towards Safe to Learn's Call to Action that sets out five axes to prioritize to ensure all girls and boys are safe to learn: (1) policy and legislation, (2) strengthening prevention response at the school level, (3) shifting social norms and changing behaviors, (4) investing in resources effectively, and (5) generating and using evidence to bring about change. <sup>6</sup>UNESCO Institute of Statistics. (2017). Reducing Global Poverty through Universal Primary and Secondary Education. Policy paper 32/Fact Sheet 44. Montreal, Canada: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.<sup>7</sup>New York Civil Liberties Union (2015). <sup>8</sup>In 2018, UNICEF documented 742 attacks on schools globally. In West and Central Africa, attacks led in June 2019 to almost 10,000 school closures affecting 1.91 million children and 44,000 teachers (United Nations Children's Fund. (2019). Education Under Threat in West and Central Africa, UNICEF Child Alert, UNICEF, New York). <sup>9</sup>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Global Education Monitoring Reports. Infographics, UNESCO, Paris.







## VIOLENCE IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS IS PREVALENT AND MULTIFACETED

It is estimated that up to one billion children aged 2–17 years have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in a year.<sup>10</sup> For VIAS specifically, studies paint a bleak picture; they show that prevalence is high in most countries, even though the way it manifests itself can be different. Our study finds that **globally, a quarter to a third of students are bullied by their peers or affected by physical violence**<sup>11</sup>.

### CHILDREN'S VOICES<sup>12</sup>

*Students “tend to bully people who they find defects in, but... not really defects because no one is perfect. For example, if someone is a bit chubby, or doesn't have the same body as everyone else, or if they have a different nationality. Even just for the fact that they are smarter than you.”*

**Alba, 13 years old, Spain**

*“I think it is children [are bullied] who are different or have different abilities. Children that are different or have a different skin color, people that think they are strange and think that person is not normal, so I am going to be mean to them.”*

**Noor, Canada**

*“There are some children that bring [violence] from their home; their parents insult them and hit them and all that... They memorize that, and the child thinks that maybe that it is OK because in their home that happens, they get to school and there they take it out on other children.”*

**Alexa, 12 years old, Mexico**

*“Why is there a need to hit children?”*

**Aarya, 12 years old, India**

### VIOLENCE BREEDS VIOLENCE

Different forms of violence rarely occur in isolation; on the contrary, they tend to reinforce each other. While a child suffering poly-victimization<sup>13</sup> may not necessarily see or understand the link between one type of violence and another, the adults around them should. Our analysis confirms what other studies have found: being subjected to one type of violence is associated with a higher likelihood of becoming the victim of another. For example, **having been bullied is associated with an increase in the likelihood of having been attacked in school by 17 percentage points**. At home, the literature suggests that children who have witnessed or experienced violence tend to have a higher probability of either perpetrating violence or of becoming victims of violence when they grow up.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>10</sup>This figure includes all forms of violence against children, not only VIAS. <sup>11</sup>(1) the Global School Health Survey (GSHS); (2) the Health Behavior in School-Age Children survey (HBSC); (3) the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); (4) the Violence against Children Survey (VACS); and (5) the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). <sup>12</sup>Child Fund Alliance. 2019. Small Voices, Big Dreams. Violence Against Children as Explained by children. <sup>13</sup>Poly-victimization refers to the experience of children who are exposed to different types of violence in more than one area. These children are at higher risk of lasting harm because poly-victimization has a cumulative negative effect. <sup>14</sup>On LGBTQ, see for example Egeland (1993); Hotelling, G. T. & Sugarman, D. B. (1986). An analysis of risk markers in husband to wife violence: the current state of knowledge. *Violence Vict.* 1(2), 101-24.; Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. New York: Prentice-Hall; Ehrensaft et al. (2003); Fargo, J. D. (2009). *Pathways to Adult Sexual Revictimization: Direct and Indirect Behavioral Risk Factors Across the Lifespan*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11(24); Maguire et al. (2015).





## VIOLENCE IN AND AROUND SCHOOL HARMS EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Students who are victims of violence are more likely to skip school or drop out. Those who remain may be too scared or anxious to absorb information. Children who suffer violence learn less, which is why **violence has a direct effect on performance.**

### TEST SCORES

Being threatened, harassed or hit by another student can all have dramatic impacts on test scores. Our analysis with data from international student assessments suggests that **when a student is the victim of violence, there is an associated reduction in performance on mathematics, reading and science tests.** When violence is eliminated, performance improves according to simulations.

Corporal punishment remains widespread and is still legal in 67 countries. Not only does it affect learning, it also contributes to perpetuating a culture of violence at school. Our analysis of data from 10 Francophone countries in Africa finds that almost two thirds of students say they had been beaten by teachers. **If violence and corporal punishment were eliminated, average reading and mathematics scores would increase.**

At school, playing and socializing are crucial to wellbeing and development, but also for academic performance. **Our analysis suggests that when a student doesn't play with other children, there is an associated reduction in performance on test scores.**

Even compared with other factors that affect test scores such as socio-economic background, the effect of disability, and teacher absenteeism, among others, our analysis suggests that VIAS has a large negative effect on learning.

In the United States, our results suggest that VIAS affects learning outcomes as measured through grades (A being the highest score and F representing failure) as well as whether students are distracted in the classroom. For example, **being involved in fights at school decreases the likelihood of getting an A and increases the likelihood of getting a lower grade. For virtually all other indicators surveyed, exposure to VIAS leads to worse outcomes.**

### HOW VIAS AFFECTS LEARNING

Across the world, we observed that VIAS negatively affects education outcomes by bringing down test scores in reading, math and science.

Compared with other factors that affect scores such as socio-economic background, the effect of disability and teacher absenteeism among others, numbers suggest that VIAS has a large effect on learning.

Eliminating VIAS would see significant increases in scores for reading, math and science.





## ABSENTEEISM AND DROPPING OUT

VIAS not only affects test results — it may also keep children away from school, sometimes for good. VIAS is associated with a reduction in the likelihood of attending school. The average share of students who miss school at some point over a month is usually around 20 percent. If all forms of VIAS were eliminated, that number would drop by 4.0 percentage points.

Violence also affects completion rates. This is clear from surveys that focus on measuring violence against children, but also from other surveys that ask parents why their children dropped out of school. The share of students dropping out of school specifically because of violence is low, but not negligible (1.2 percent in India, 5.3 percent in Ethiopia and 1.9 percent in Vietnam for example), but it is likely to be underestimated as violence is normalized in many communities, for example with parents considering the use of corporal punishment a legitimate form of discipline. Similarly, bullying may be considered by some to be part of the normal school experience with little understanding of the damaging impacts it can have.

In Uganda, according to principals, discipline — which may be a response to VIAS — was one of the main factors leading boys to drop out of school. For girls, the top three reasons were pregnancy, marriage — where again violence may be a contributing factor<sup>15</sup> — and cost.

In many other countries, **child marriage and early pregnancies, which may be due in part to violence, are a key reason for dropping out. The risk of sexual harassment in school or on the way to school and back is a real problem, even if it is not often reflected in quantitative data.**

## ECONOMIC COST OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL

**The cost of VIAS in lost lifetime earnings for the labour force is estimated to be of the order of US\$ 11 trillion.** This estimate combines the effects of VIAS on schooling and learning, and how this may affect earnings in adulthood. It is not meant to be precise given the many assumptions involved, but it suggests that economics costs are high.

A man with secondary education can expect to earn twice as much compared to someone with no education. For women with secondary education, the average gain compared to no schooling is even higher at close to 130 percent, and for women with tertiary education, the average gain is still substantially higher. In other words, **the further you go in school, the higher the expected gains in earnings.**

**VIAS can have a particularly negative impact on girls and women, including for their future labor force participation.** At a time when the global community is calling for a renewed push for girls' education, we need to firmly embed ending VIAS in our programs and policies if we are to deliver on our pledges to the next generation.

### HOW VIAS AFFECTS THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE:

By affecting schooling and learning, VIAS can have a large negative effect on earnings in adulthood.

Individuals with a secondary education may earn twice as much as those with no education,. They are also more likely in many countries to join the labor force.

But quality also matters: primary education without literacy is not associated with earnings gains. Ending VIAS is essential to improve learning, including in primary schools.

<sup>15</sup>Wodon, Q., Nguyen, C., and Tsimpo, C. (2016). Child Marriage, Education, and Agency in Uganda, *Feminist Economist*, 22(1), 54-79.





It's not just how far you make it in school that counts. **The quality of the education also matters.** When individuals have a primary education but are not literate, earnings gains in comparison to those with no education at all are virtually non-existent. **Simply going to school is not enough. Emphasis must be put on learning, not just on physical attendance; but for this embedding violence prevention in education systems is needed to ensure all girls and boys can learn effectively.**

## CHILD MARRIAGE, FERTILITY AND POPULATION GROWTH

**Because VIAS reduces girls' chances of going to and staying in school, it also contributes indirectly to child marriage and higher fertility.** Girls who drop out of school may be forced to marry early. They end up having children earlier and more children over their lifetime.<sup>16</sup> **Keeping girls in school and safe is one of the best ways to prevent child marriage and early childbearing, and thereby reduces associated health risks.** Findings show that universal secondary education for girls increases their ability to make their own healthcare decisions. **Overall, our analysis suggests that universal secondary education could lead to a reduction in total fertility of up to a third.**<sup>17</sup>

## HOW VIAS AFFECTS FUTURE PROSPECTS

VIAS is a major reason for missing school days.

VIAS is cited by parents as a reason for their children to drop out of school in household surveys.

VIAS is associated with a large number of other negative effects for the experience of the child in school as well as for the child's physical and mental health.



# PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TO END VIOLENCE IN AND THROUGH SCHOOLS

Rather than dismissing violence as inevitable, identifying risk factors that lead to violent behavior can help break the cycle. There is growing evidence around the world that interventions to eliminate VIAS work. **Incorporating violence prevention in public policy and making it part of the mainstream education system is the way forward.**

Risk factors for violence can be identified at several levels: individual/family, school, community and society. They may change depending on context, location and the time in a child's life. **This is why multiple protective factors covering the whole life cycle of a child must be put in place to end violence in and through schools.** These protective factors help mitigate the chances of violence occurring and also underline the types of interventions and approaches needed to prevent VIAS.

- **At the individual/family level: Risk factors** can include childhood disruptive behavior, cognitive deficits, poor nutrition, prenatal and perinatal complications and mothers' substance abuse during pregnancy.<sup>18</sup> Depending on context,<sup>19</sup> other risk factors include gender,<sup>20</sup> sexual orientation,<sup>21</sup> low socio-economic status, and substance abuse. **Protective factors** include caring relationships with parents and other adults as well as positive communication and discipline.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Onagoruwa, A. & Wodon, Q. (2018). Measuring the Impact of Child Marriage on Total Fertility: A Study for Fifteen Countries. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 50(5), 626-39. <sup>17</sup>Wodon, Q., & de la Brière, B. (2018). Unrealized Potential: The High Cost of Gender Inequality in Earnings. *The Cost of Gender Inequality Notes Series*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Part of the potential effect of educational attainment and child marriage on total fertility may come from the use of modern contraceptive methods since such use tends to increase with higher educational attainment, at least in some countries. <sup>18</sup>See for example Murata, K., P. Weihe, E. Budtz-Jorgensen, P. J. Jorgensen, & P. Grandjean. (2004). Delayed Brainstem Auditory Evoked Potential Latencies in 14-Year-Old Children Exposed to Methylmercury. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 144(2), 177-83; and Hu, X. Z., Lipsky, R. H., Zhu, G., Akhtar, L. A., Taubman, J., Greenberg, B. D., et al. (2006). Serotonin transporter promoter gain-of-function genotypes are linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder. *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 78, 815-826. <sup>19</sup>See Alda, E. (2005). School-Based Violence Prevention. Technical Brief 11. Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank, for a review. <sup>20</sup>Boys are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of physical violence (Schäfer and Korn, 2002; Sebastião et al., 2002). But girls are more often victims of dating violence, abuse, sexual assault and harassment, and exploitation. <sup>21</sup>See for example UNESCO and UNICEF (2014). *School-related gender-based violence in the Asia-Pacific region*. Bangkok: UNESCO. <sup>22</sup>Blum, R. W., Beuhring, T., & Rinehart, P. M. (2000). *Protecting teens: Beyond race, income and family structure*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Center for Adolescent Health.







- **At the school level: Risk factors** can include lack of resources, a school climate characterized by anti-social behaviors, use of corporal punishment, lack of positive role models and caring adults,<sup>23</sup> poor school governance and classroom environment,<sup>24</sup> gang activity within schools and access to various types of weapons.<sup>25</sup> **Protective factors** include caring relationships with teachers and school staff, inclusion, opportunities to participate in the classroom and recognition of contributions.<sup>26</sup>
- **At the community/societal level: Risk factors** can include the presence of gangs, the prevalence of crime and violence in the community, high levels of unemployment or underemployment, high population density, poverty,<sup>27</sup> norms conducive of violence and gender inequality, wars and dictatorships. **Protective factors** include participation in community networks and groups such as neighborhood associations or religious and school organizations.<sup>28</sup>

## INTERVENTIONS: A LIFECYCLE APPROACH

When designing strategies and programs seeking to prevent violence in and through schools, it is important to look at the whole cycle of a child's life and adapt interventions to every phase, and every situation. Research shows that to prevent violence, it is best to start with interventions as early as possible. However, it is important to remember that **it is never too late to prevent violence.**

### PRENATAL CARE: PREVENTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SUPPORTING HEALTHY PREGNANCY

In many cases, the root of violent behavior can be traced back to early childhood and even to the womb. If a mother uses illicit drugs or alcohol in pregnancy, or if she experiences violence while pregnant, it can have negative consequences on the baby's development, which in turn can make them more prone to violence.

#### RISK FACTORS:

Child Maltreatment  
Substance abuse  
Exposure to violence  
Toxic stress  
Undernutrition

#### EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS:<sup>29</sup>

Parenting skills programs  
Substance abuse prevention programs  
Bonding and positive discipline assistance  
Mental health programs  
Nutrition programs



<sup>23</sup>See for example Watson, R. (1995). A guide to violence prevention. *Educational Leadership*, 55(2), 57–59; and Rossman, S., and Morley, E. (1996). Introduction. *Education and Urban Society*, 28(4), 395–411. <sup>24</sup>Fisher, K. (2001). Building Better Outcomes: The Impact of School Infrastructure on Student Outcomes and Behavior. Rubida Research for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia. <sup>25</sup>Abramovay, M., and Das Graças Rua, M. (2002). Violence in Schools. Brasília: UNESCO. <sup>26</sup>Hawkins, J. D., Von Cleve, E., Catalano, R. (1991). Reducing Early Childhood Aggression: Results of a Primary Prevention Program. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30(2), 208–217. <sup>27</sup>Gottfredson, D. C. (2001). *Schools and Delinquency*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <sup>28</sup>Catalano, R.F., Oxford, M.L., Harachi, T.W., Abbott, R.D., & Haggerty, K.P. (1999). A test of the social development model to predict problem behaviour during the elementary school period. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 9:39–56. and Violence Prevention Institute (2001). What Factors Foster Resiliency Against Violence? School Violence prevention fact sheets No 5. Oakland, CA. <sup>29</sup>Nurse Family Partnership in the United States.







## EARLY CHILDHOOD: PREVENTING CHILD MALTREATMENT AND ENHANCING PARENTING SKILLS

Child maltreatment is a major risk factor in early childhood. Aggression exhibited by very young children is a strong predictor of future aggression, antisocial behavior and criminal activity, which may lead to unemployment and mental health issues.<sup>30</sup> Nutrition is also an important element in the early years. Poor nutrition can lead to impaired growth and repeated infections which can lead to long-term damage to the brain. This, in turn, can impact a child's cognitive and psychological responses later in life.

### RISK FACTORS:

- Child Maltreatment
- Aggression
- Cognitive impairment
- Behavioral problems
- Learning difficulties
- Undernutrition and stunting

### EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS:<sup>31</sup>

- Cognitive development programs
- Behavioral skills programs
- Academic skills programs
- Teacher training
- Nutritional programs
- Mental health interventions

## PRIMARY EDUCATION: POSITIVE EMOTIONS MANAGEMENT AND PEACEFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Interventions in this phase have focused mainly on Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) which helps children become self-aware, understand their feelings and their values. It guides them in how to regulate their emotions, manage stress and control impulses. SEL programs also work to foster empathy and compassion in children. Primary school is also an important time to lay the foundations to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) that takes place in adolescence.

### RISK FACTORS:

- Aggression
- Emotion regulation problems
- Behavioral problems
- Name calling and bullying
- Isolation
- GBV

### EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS:<sup>32</sup>

- SEL programs
- Mindfulness meditation
- Conflict resolution programs
- Bullying awareness and prevention
- GBV awareness and prevention

## SECONDARY EDUCATION: ANTI-BULLYING INTERVENTIONS AND GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMS

All types of violence are possible in secondary school, but the dominant themes are bullying and gender-based violence. Specific interventions focusing on preventing dating violence are also crucial as this topic requires its own attention. For at-risk adolescents that display serious anti-social behaviors, and who may be involved in delinquency or are considering dropping out of school, other approaches such as cognitive behavioral training (CBT) have proven effective.

### RISK FACTORS:

- Bullying
- Peer pressure
- Anti-social behavior
- Delinquency
- Substance abuse
- Exclusion
- Isolation
- Aggression
- Dating violence

### EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS:<sup>33</sup>

- Anti-bullying programs
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Parent training/meetings
- Teacher training
- Improved playground supervision
- Classroom management
- Life Skills training
- After-school programs

<sup>30</sup>Chioda, L. (2017). Stop the Violence in Latin America: A Look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood. Latin American Development Forum. Washington, DC: The World Bank. <sup>31</sup>Examples of programs include Parent Corps; Project STAR and Generation PMTO; The Child-Parent Center Education Program; The High/Scope Perry Preschool program. <sup>32</sup>Examples of programs include Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) in Jamaica; Quiet Time program in San Francisco; Mindful Schools in Oakland; Aulas en Paz in Colombia. <sup>33</sup>Examples of programs include The Colorado Blueprints; The LifeSkills Training; Becoming a Man (BAM); Fourth R.





# POLICIES AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

## REPORTING VIAS: WHAT TO DO WHEN CASES OF VIOLENCE ARE IDENTIFIED?

When violence or bullying takes place in a school, children should know where to go, who to speak to, and most importantly, that they should not be afraid to report the violence. **Child-friendly, safe, and reliable reporting mechanisms are absolutely crucial to stemming violence in and through schools.** There are many different channels through which violence can be reported including child-friendly helplines, chat rooms, online reporting and anonymous boxes. School staff must be adequately trained to deal with reports of violence and with their fallout. Children must feel they can trust the adults in charge to take appropriate actions, and that they will be protected from retaliation. Interventions can include health services, psychosocial support, protective care (police services), and legal services if needed.

## BEYOND SPECIFIC PROGRAMS: THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES AND LAWS

Individual programs need to be underpinned by policies and laws that support their goal. When these are well implemented via solid enforcement mechanisms, they can have a major impact on violence reduction.

However, while many countries have adopted laws to prevent corporal punishment, the practice is often still used by teachers due to weak inspection and enforcement. **Laws and policies are only as effective as the will and capacity to see them enforced.** Authorities must be actively engaged in seeing implementation through. While there have been improvements in violence prevention legislation around the world, there is still much work to be done. Research suggests that<sup>34</sup>:

- 1 in 5 countries do not have adequate laws against sexual harassment at work.
- 4 in 5 countries do not have adequate laws against sexual harassment in public spaces.
- 6 in 10 countries do not have adequate laws against sexual harassment in education.
- 1 in 3 countries do not have criminal penalties for sexual harassment.
- Corporal punishment is still lawful in 67 countries.

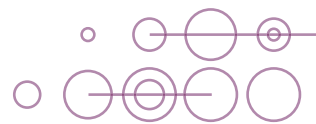
## THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

A systemic approach that looks for solutions to VIAS at a national level would ideally include schools, students, parent associations, teachers' unions, community leaders, religious groups and political parties. Government efforts led by ministries of education are vital. **Strategic approaches for violence prevention** can take the following four-step process:

- **SET CLEAR STANDARDS:** Pass laws that prohibit all forms of violence, and in particular violence against children in school. Legislative efforts must be accompanied by awareness campaigns on children's rights and the detrimental effects of VIAS.
- **DEVELOP DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS:** This helps guide violence prevention plans and measures the quality of national efforts to prevent and respond to VIAS. The Safe to Learn Programmatic Framework and Diagnostic Tool developed by UNICEF and endorsed by the 14 partners of the STL Coalition helps assess countries' progress towards the call to action. It has been piloted in five countries. Lessons learned show the benefits of such a diagnostic to push the agenda forward.
- **SET ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS:** Develop action plans that define standards and install accountability mechanisms (including inspection) across agencies and sectors.
- **PROMOTE A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH:** This ensures a positive learning environment by paying attention to the different forms of violence taking place, the gender dynamics at play and the different ages groups affected.

<sup>34</sup>Tavares and Wodon (2018).





## A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH IS MORE LIKELY TO CHANGE MINDSETS

A ‘whole school approach’ is a comprehensive VIAS prevention strategy that seeks the collaboration of everyone involved in a school to help change negative social norms and promote respect, equality and safety. Engaging everyone in this way creates a sense of belonging and ownership that helps foster inclusion and improve students’ well-being. A whole school approach usually works on several areas including **physical activity, nutrition, health education, counselling, employee wellness, community involvement, child rights awareness and promoting gender equality**. Teachers and parents or caregivers play an especially important role in this.

Breaking old habits is not always easy, but it has been shown to be possible. In Sweden, a general ban on all forms of corporal punishment against children, with corresponding public education campaigns, helped decrease public support for corporal punishment from 54 percent to 11 percent in 25 years.<sup>35</sup> In Uganda, the Good School Toolkit, a program working with teachers, staff and students to promote positive discipline and empathy showed that after 18 months, the number of teachers who reported using physical violence against students dropped by half.



## ENHANCING TEACHERS’ SKILLS ON POSITIVE DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Supporting teachers to manage their classrooms has been shown to reduce bullying and violence in schools. Among the different types of interventions analyzed,<sup>36</sup> those focusing on providing teachers with skills to improve their relationship with students and manage students’ behaviors had the strongest and most reliable results in decreasing disruptive and aggressive behavior in the classroom. Other successful interventions included SEL programs and strategies for working with parents. By contrast, punitive measures were shown to feed into violence, delinquency and exclusion.

In Jamaica, a program<sup>37</sup> to empower early childhood teachers to create emotionally supportive classroom environments and teach preschool children socio-emotional skills helped reduce teachers’ uses of violence and improved children’s behavior overall.

<sup>35</sup>Durrant, J. E. (1999). Evaluating the success of Sweden’s corporal punishment ban. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23(5), 435–448. <sup>36</sup>Valdebenito, S., Eisner, M., Farrington, D.P. et al. (2019). What can we do to reduce disciplinary school exclusion? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 15, 253–287. <sup>37</sup>RIE Classroom Toolbox.







## GIVING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT

The role of parents and caregivers in reducing VIAS cannot be overstated. Even mild corporal punishment can be detrimental to a child's development. Teaching parents and caregivers' alternative ways to deal with their children — including **positive discipline, positive communication, and increased bonding** — is key to eliminating violence in and through schools.

Parenting programs come in all different shapes and sizes. Some provide step-by-step instructions, others have less structured formats, while some simply consist of newsletters. It is important to not only help parents choose the best program for them, but to keep them engaged as long as possible to see real sustained change. In order to make parent programs work better, certain courses of action were particularly helpful, including having a **thorough recruitment processes, good communication and being flexible around parents' needs and working hours**. Because programs can be so context-sensitive, it is important to allow practitioners the space and flexibility to be creative with their approaches in attracting parents to programs.

## WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES ON SOCIAL NORMS AND SAFE TRAVEL TO SCHOOLS

Violence is sometimes — if not often — a by-product of the environment in which people live. Poverty, unemployment, trauma and discrimination are all factors that can destroy community. School programs are therefore far more likely to succeed if they are supported by a tight community that shares the same goals. Community interventions that have proven effective included **media campaigns to change social norms, local activism, advocacy, community training and community watchdog schemes**.

Communities also have a big responsibility to ensure that children are safe on their way to and back from school, with actions such as improving street lighting. Involving community members, shop keepers and street vendors in keeping a lookout for children's safety has also proved effective. In Iraq, the Walking Buses program provided girls with two trained adults to escort them to school and in Jamaica, traffic wardens<sup>38</sup> were brought in to help make routes safer.

One Ugandan example showed that social norms can be challenged even in a relatively short period of time. The SASA! Program used local activism, media and advocacy, communication, and training, to reduce levels of violence against women by 52 percent. In India, the Bell Bajao! (Ring the Bell) Campaign<sup>39</sup> calls on men and boys across India to take a stand against domestic violence by performing a simple bystander intervention — ringing the doorbell when they witness domestic violence taking place. The campaign also uses media strategies to bring the conversation about domestic violence into the mainstream.



<sup>38</sup>Integrated Community Development Program <sup>39</sup>Breakthrough Insights. 2013. Breakthrough's Bell Bajao! A Campaign to Bring Domestic Violence to a Halt. Available at: [www.breakthrough.tv/o/wp-content/files\\_mf/1330816837BellBajao\\_Insight.pdf](http://www.breakthrough.tv/o/wp-content/files_mf/1330816837BellBajao_Insight.pdf); Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., & Zimmerman, C. (2015). Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice. *Lancet*, 385(9978), 1672–1684.





## ENDING VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL IS A SMART INVESTMENT

Cost-benefit analyses suggest that implementing interventions to prevent violence in and through schools from early childhood to secondary education is undeniably a smart economic investment.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS

The first thousand days of a child's life are critical to their development when hundreds of new neural connections are formed in the brain every second. Because of the demonstrated links between brain development and the risk of violence later in life, **significant efforts must be invested in creating healthy early childhood environments.** Some programs, such as health and nutrition interventions cost relatively little. Others which include making preschools more accessible are more expensive. **Research suggests however that in most cases there is a high benefit to cost ratio, which means that the positive results of interventions exceed their costs.**

Cost-benefit analyses look at various types of benefits, including those related to education, health, employment and earnings, crime and social welfare. **Some early childhood interventions have been shown to produce benefits of up to 16 times the cost invested in them.**<sup>40</sup>

### SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND RELATED PROGRAMS

One of the main recommendations to reduce the prevalence of violence in primary schools is the introduction of socio-emotional learning (SEL) programs. Acquiring socio-emotional skills leads to increased well-being, positive attitudes, pro-social behavior, reductions in risky behaviors and improves academic performance.<sup>41</sup> In secondary schools, Cognitive Behavioral Training (CBT) has proven highly effective in combatting aggression and dating violence and empowers adolescents to build healthy relationships.<sup>42</sup> Finally, after-school programs that combine recreational activities and academic support may also reduce violence. All of these skills can lead to success in the labor market.<sup>43</sup> **Some SEL programs have been shown to yield benefits of up to 14 times their cost.**<sup>44</sup>

### ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS

In secondary schools, there is often a strong focus on bullying prevention. Studies suggest that intensive and long-lasting programs are most beneficial in changing behaviors, with parental involvement playing a big role in the success of the programs.<sup>45</sup> A review of **several anti-bullying programs suggests that interventions reduced the prevalence of bullying by about one fifth on average**<sup>46</sup>, **producing economic benefits of up to seven times the cost of the programs.**<sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Ending violence in and around schools is not only the right thing to do, it is also a sound economic investment. As much of the available data in terms of cost-benefit analyses has come from high-income countries, more research is needed to assess how these programs may perform in low-and middle-income countries. However, it is clear from the emerging evidence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that many programs can work. We do have evidence to act now, and work together to end violence in and around schools. Safe to Learn has been created to make this vision a reality. We need you all to join the movement.

Please consult the full report for even more findings and the corresponding analysis. It is available on the World Bank website: [openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35969](https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35969) and the Safe to Learn website: [www.end-violence/safe-to-learn](http://www.end-violence/safe-to-learn). To join the Safe to Learn movement, please contact: [Safetolearn@end-violence.org](mailto:Safetolearn@end-violence.org).

<sup>40</sup>Adapted from Dalziel, K. M., Halliday, D. & Segal, L. (2015). Assessment of the Cost-Benefit Literature on Early Childhood Education for Vulnerable Children: What the Findings Mean for Policy. SAGE Open, January-March, 1-14.<sup>41</sup>Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P. & Pachan, M. (2010). A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3-4):294-309; Sklad et al. (2012). <sup>42</sup>dating violence: A cluster randomized trial. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 163(8), 692-699. <sup>43</sup>Heckman and Kautz (2012). <sup>44</sup>Adapted from Belfield, C., Klapp, A., & Lebin, H. M. (2015). The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning, *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, 6(03). <sup>45</sup>Farrington, D. & Ttofi, M. (2009). School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2009:6. <sup>46</sup>Farrington, D. & Ttofi, M. (2009). School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2009:6. <sup>47</sup>Compiled by the authors





