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Effect of Social Skill Training Programs on Bullying

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Introduction

Bullying is a problem that is often found in schools during the adolescence age. Although this is not a new concept, bullying continues to lead to the victimization of children and adolescents all over the world. Research has played a critical role in understanding bullying, victimization, and prevention programs. However, bullying and victimization still continue to be problems within schools and peer relationships.

The primary purpose of this systematic review is to assist practitioners by investigating evidence-based studies related to school social skill programs, and their effectiveness in reducing victimization of bullying throughout adolescence.

Research Question

Are social skill training (SST) programs effective in reducing the victimization of bullying throughout adolescence?

Methods

The review included the following criteria:

➤ **Inclusion Criteria:**

- Adolescents (age 10-19 as defined by WHO)
- School-based interventions specifically addressing social skills
- Studies with a RCT or Quasi-experimental design
- Studies published from 2000-2015

➤ **Exclusion Criteria:**

- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals not within our age range (10-19 years old)

Databases and keywords searched are identified in Table 1 & Table 2.

Table 1

Databases
Google Scholar
PubMed
WMU Library Database
Medline
ProQuest

Table 2

Keywords
Bullying
Adolescence
Social skill programs
Social skill training
Victimization
School-based bully prevention programs

Findings

A total of 20 articles were identified:

- Due to defined age criteria 13 articles were not included.
- Of the remaining 7 articles fitting the inclusion criteria, 4 were RCT's and 3 were quasi-experimental.

Table 3 illustrates the findings of the 7 articles.

Table 3: Summary of Article Findings

Article	Finding
“The Impact of a Middle School Program to Reduce Aggression, Victimization, and Sexual Violence” <small>Espelage, D. L., Low, S., Polanin, J., & Brown, E. C. (2013)</small>	Less reports of self-aggression after the SS-SSTP intervention program.
“Evaluating the effectiveness of a social skills training (SST) programme for victims of bullying” <small>Fox, C. L., & Boulton, M. J. (2003)</small>	Significant increases in the global self-worth scores directly following SST intervention. No statistical difference at the 3 month follow-up.
“The investigation of the effectiveness of social skill training in theory of mind improvement in aggressive students and the assessment of it's effective stability” <small>Ghaffari, A., Banijamali, S., Ahadi, H., & Ahghar, G. (2011)</small>	SST improved theory of mind in people with aggressive behavior, which remained stable at post-test 1 and post-test 2.
“Social Skills Training as a Mean of Improving Intervention for Bullies and Victims” <small>Köiv, K. (2012)</small>	Significant decrease in frequency of bullying within target group following SST however only slight decrease in frequency of bullying at the whole school level. SST may not be sufficient alone to address bullying at the whole school level.
“Engagement matters: Lessons from assessing classroom implementation of steps to respect: A bully prevention program over a one-year period” <small>Low, S., Van Ryzin, M. J., Brown, E. C., Smith, B. H., & Haggerty, K. P. (2014)</small>	Outcomes are dependent on who delivers the program lessons, where the lessons take place, and what program is actually delivered.
“The effectiveness of group interventions in reducing the level of bullying behaviors in middle school settings” <small>Rogers, S. L. (2007)</small>	Not a statistical difference in social skills or victimization between pretest and posttest scores. Significant difference was reported for a decrease in bully behavior at the posttest analysis.
“School-based prevention of bullying and relational aggression in adolescence: The fairplay.manual” <small>Scheithauer, H., Hess, M., Schultze-Krumbholz, A., & Bull, H. D. (2012)</small>	Intervention resulted in small, positive, and statistically significant, but not practically relevant outcomes in terms of reducing bully behaviors

Conclusions

SST programs result in short term decreases in bully victimization.

- Strong evidence does not exist to suggest that SST programs are effective by themselves as a means to decrease adolescents long-term likelihood of becoming a victim of bullying.
- SST programs require a continuous curriculum embedded throughout the adolescent's education.

SST programs need to be supplemented in each adolescent's home.

Clinical Implications

Advocate for:

- School-based anti-bully curriculum that is implemented at the whole school level, and continues throughout each student's entire academic career.
- Bully prevention programs that strategically incorporate anti-bully environments, highly trained leaders, and lesson plans individualized to the social and cognitive levels of the students.
- Families to implement anti-bully programs within the home.

Research is critically needed to investigate the effectiveness of the most current SST programs utilized in the school systems today.

Limitations

The ability to make conclusions about the effectiveness of SST programs on victimization of bullying is limited due to a lack of research conducted on the specific program. Much of the existing research pertaining to SST programs are outdated. In addition, current research investigating bully prevention programs involve elementary school populations. The adolescent population is underrepresented in this research topic.

Resources

Available upon request.