

CIMA EVIDENCE

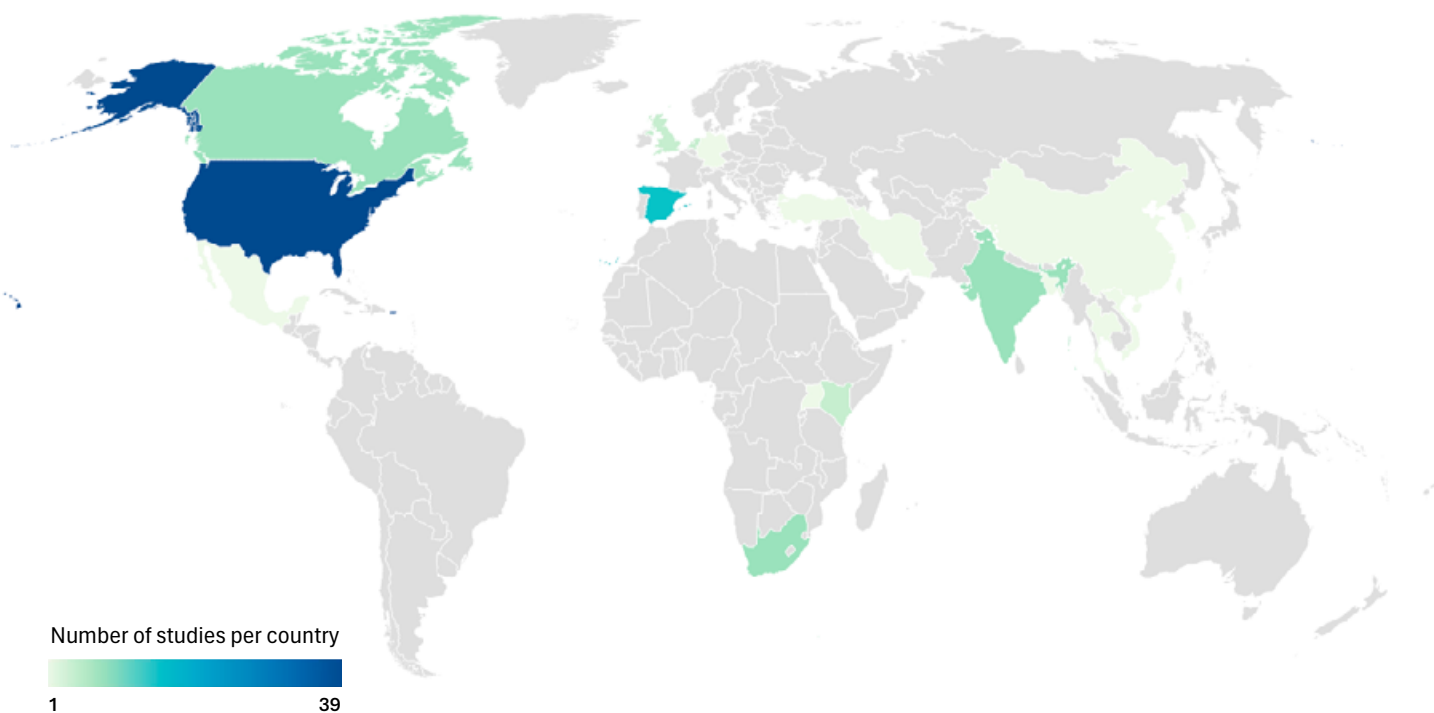
Latin America and the Caribbean

What Works in School-Based Prevention of Violence Against Girls?

by Emma Näslund-Hadley, Luciana Etcheverry, Rosangela Bando, Haydee Alonzo, and Ariana Grossi.

Evidence from 71 studies shows that schools can play a central role in preventing violence against girls. Across studies, interventions produce meaningful and policy-relevant improvements in students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to violence against girls, and they also reduce the prevalence of violence, although effects on prevalence tend to be smaller. Impacts are consistently positive across regions where results are on par with those found in higher-income countries. Among the different approaches, social norms theory approaches show the strongest impacts, followed by bystander models, behavioral interventions, and gender-transformative approaches.

Geographic Distribution of the Evidence Base for School-Based Prevention of Violence Against Girls



Source: Elaborated by authors.

Note: The heat map reflects the number of studies identified in the systematic review for each country. Darker shading represents more evidence, lighter shading represents less, and unshaded areas indicate no studies.



Most Evidence on Preventing Violence Against Girls in Schools Comes from a Small Set of High-Income Countries

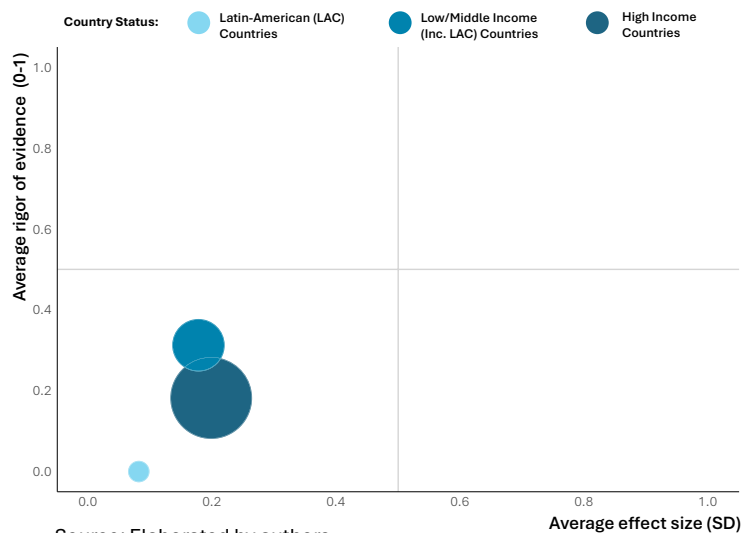
- North America and Asia dominate the global evidence on school-based prevention of violence against girls. More than half of all identified studies come from the United States, with additional clusters in Canada, India, South Africa, and Spain.
- While there are important contributions from Asia (Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam), Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Uganda), and LAC (Barbados, Mexico), the number of studies from developing countries remains modest relative to need.
- The above map highlights the near absence of evidence from the Middle East, Central Asia, the Pacific, and most of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). These regional blanks underscore critical geographic gaps that limit how generalizable current findings are for global policy and programming.



Meaningful and Consistent Impacts Across Developed and Developing Countries

- Studies from developing countries show effects in line with those found in industrialized countries (0.18 SD in low/middle income (including LAC) countries, and 0.20 SD in developed countries).
- The rigor of the studies is also comparable across country types, indicating that high-quality evidence on what works is emerging globally. Rigor scores range from 0.00 to 0.31 on a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 represents evidence of medium methodological rigor and 1 reflects the strongest research designs.

Average Effects and Evidence Rigor Across Country Context



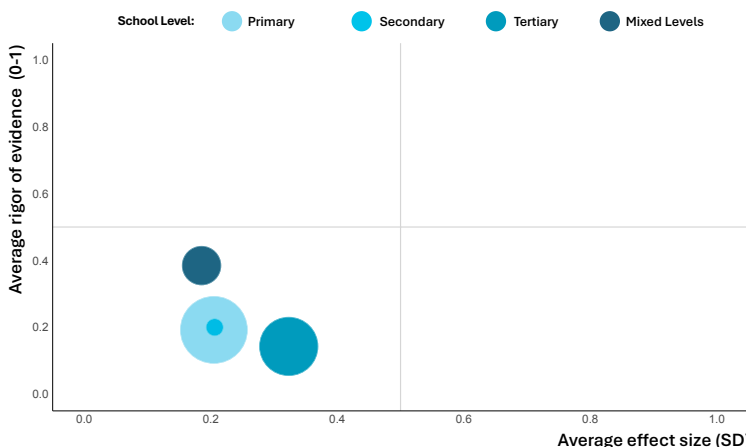
Source: Elaborated by authors.

Note: In this and other Evidence Maps in this brief, the rigor of evidence reflects the average confidence level associated with the evaluation methods used in studies within each intervention category. The average effect size represents the mean impact, measured in standard deviations (SD), across all studies within each category of the intervention characteristic. The diameter of each circle corresponds to the number of studies included in each category of the intervention characteristic.



Violence Against Girls Prevention Works at Every Education Level

Impact of School-Based Prevention of Violence Against Girls by Education Level



- Interventions are effective across all age groups, from pre-primary to secondary education, showing that prevention of violence against girls can begin early and continue effectively through adolescence.
- Tertiary students show the strongest impacts, with meaningful improvements during young adulthood (0.32 SD), underscoring how responsive this age group is to programs that address norms, relationships, and skills.
- Primary and Secondary school students also show meaningful impacts with an average effect size around 0.20 SD.

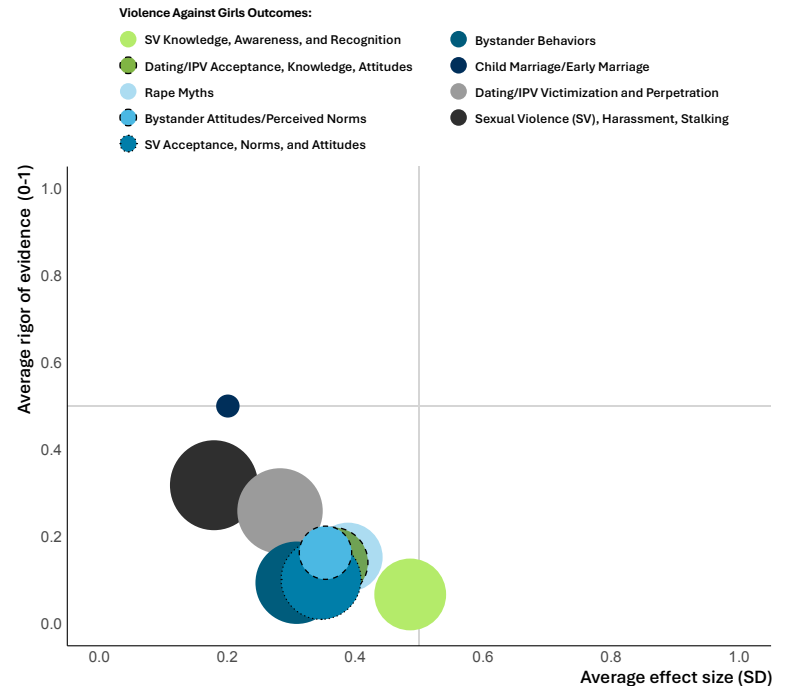
Source: Elaborated by authors.



Knowledge Shifts Easily; Behavior Change Takes More Work

- Knowledge and awareness show the largest effects, especially for sexual violence knowledge, awareness, and recognition (0.49 SD) and dating/Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) acceptance, knowledge, and attitudes (0.36 SD). These are the outcomes most responsive to school-based interventions.
- Perceptions and attitudes also improve, with moderate effects across measures such as rape myths (0.39 SD), bystander attitudes and perceived norms (0.35 SD), sexual violence acceptance and norms (0.35 SD), and bystander behaviors (0.31 SD). These shifts typically require more intensive or sustained intervention.
- Prevalence outcomes related to violence against girls show the smallest effects, including dating/IPV victimization and perpetration (0.28 SD) and sexual violence, harassment, and stalking (0.18 SD). Even so, measurable improvements indicate that school-based programs can support real-world behavior change when paired with broader cultural and structural supports.

Impact of School-Based Prevention of Violence Against Girls by Type of Outcome

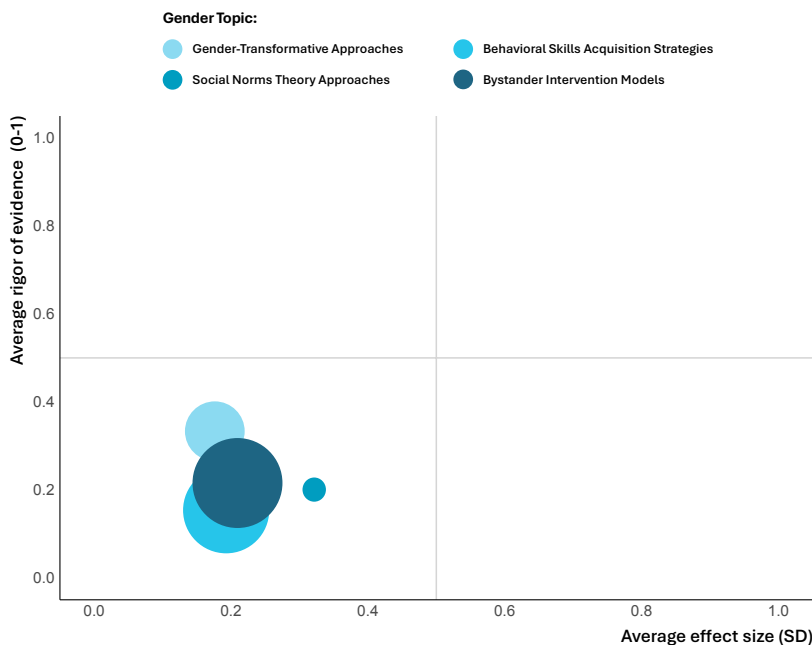


Source: Elaborated by authors.



Evidence shows strong impacts across approaches, led by Social Norms Theory Approaches

Evidence-Based Approaches That Reduce Violence Against Girls in Schools



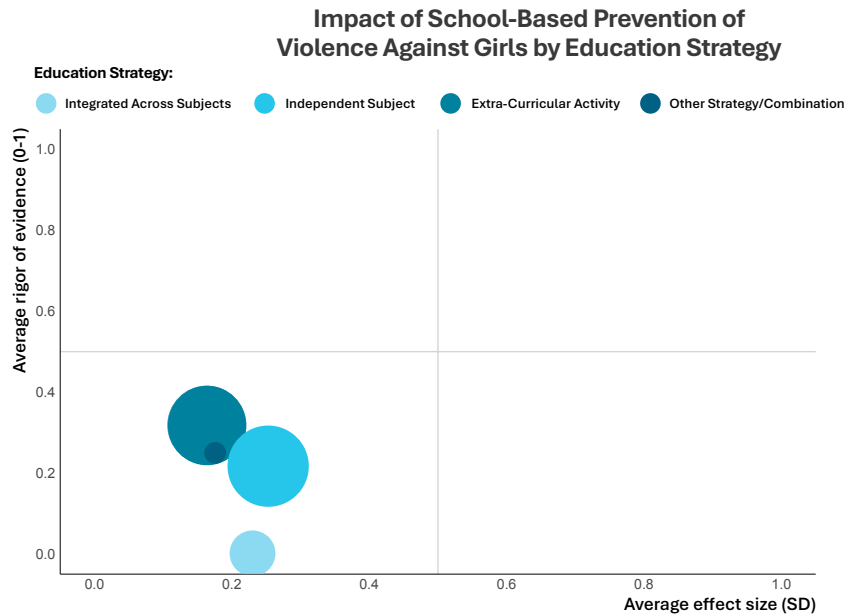
Source: Elaborated by authors.

- Social Norms Theory approaches have the strongest impact, with effects of 0.32 SD. These programs, grounded in the recognition that violence is reinforced by cultural expectations, aim to shift group norms and reduce tolerance for inequitable practices.
- Approaches focused on training students to act as bystanders also show solid results, demonstrating that changing what is considered acceptable behavior and empowering students to intervene helps reduce violence against girls (0.21 SD).
- Behavioral interventions also have a meaningful impact (0.19 SD). By teaching concrete skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and help-seeking, these programs equip students with practical tools that lead to significant improvements.
- Gender-transformative programs also generate positive results (0.18 SD), producing meaningful improvements by encouraging students to reflect on power dynamics, question harmful norms, and rethink gender expectations.



Different Education Strategies Deliver Similar Levels of Impact

- Integrated and independent subject programs show similar effects (0.23 and 0.25 SD, respectively), standing out as the most effective strategies among all education approaches.
- Extra-curricular and combination strategies show small but meaningful effects (0.18 and 0.16 SD, respectively), indicating that all approaches contribute positively even if impacts are smaller.
- Rigor is similar across strategies, showing that differences in effect sizes reflect real program variation rather than lower-quality evidence.

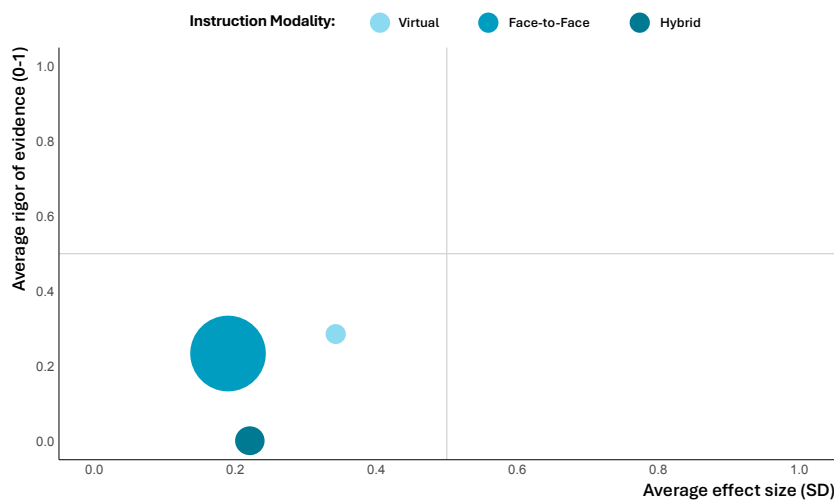


Source: Elaborated by authors.



Impact Is Small but Meaningful Across Instruction Modalities

Effects of Violence Against Girls Prevention Programs by Instruction Modality



Source: Elaborated by authors.

- Virtual interventions, although fewer in number, have the largest effects (0.34 SD) and the highest study rigor (0.29). This means that the relatively strong effects observed for virtual programs reflect real strengths in how these programs are designed and implemented.
- Face-to-face programs and hybrid models show lower but very similar effects, demonstrating that prevention of violence against girls can be delivered effectively in either format (0.19 and 0.22 SD, respectively).
- Face-to-face and hybrid models show lower study rigor (0.23 and 0.00, respectively).



Where the Evidence Is, and Isn't, on Preventing Violence Against Girls in Schools

- Evidence is heavily concentrated in traditional face-to-face programs, with very few evaluations of hybrid or fully virtual interventions, despite their growing relevance for scale and access.
- Thin evidence on several outcome areas. Most studies measure short-term knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, while there is very limited evidence on diversity and inclusion outcomes, school climate, and medium-term student education outcomes.

We are grateful for the funding provided by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Republic of Germany.

Web: <https://cima.iadb.org> | Contact: education@iadb.org

Copyright © 2026 Inter-American Development Bank (“IDB”). This work is subject to a Creative Commons license CC BY 3.0 IGO (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/legalcode>). The terms and conditions indicated in the URL link must be met and the respective recognition must be granted to the IDB.

Further to section 8 of the above license, any mediation relating to disputes arising under such license shall be conducted in accordance with the WIPO Mediation Rules. Any dispute related to the use of the works of the IDB that cannot be settled amicably shall be submitted to arbitration pursuant to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) rules. The use of the IDB’s name for any purpose other than for attribution, and the use of IDB’s logo shall be subject to a separate written license agreement between the IDB and the user and is not authorized as part of this license.

Note that the URL link includes terms and conditions that are an integral part of this license.

The opinions expressed in this work are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inter-American Development Bank, its Board of Directors, or the countries they represent.

