

CIMA EVIDENCE

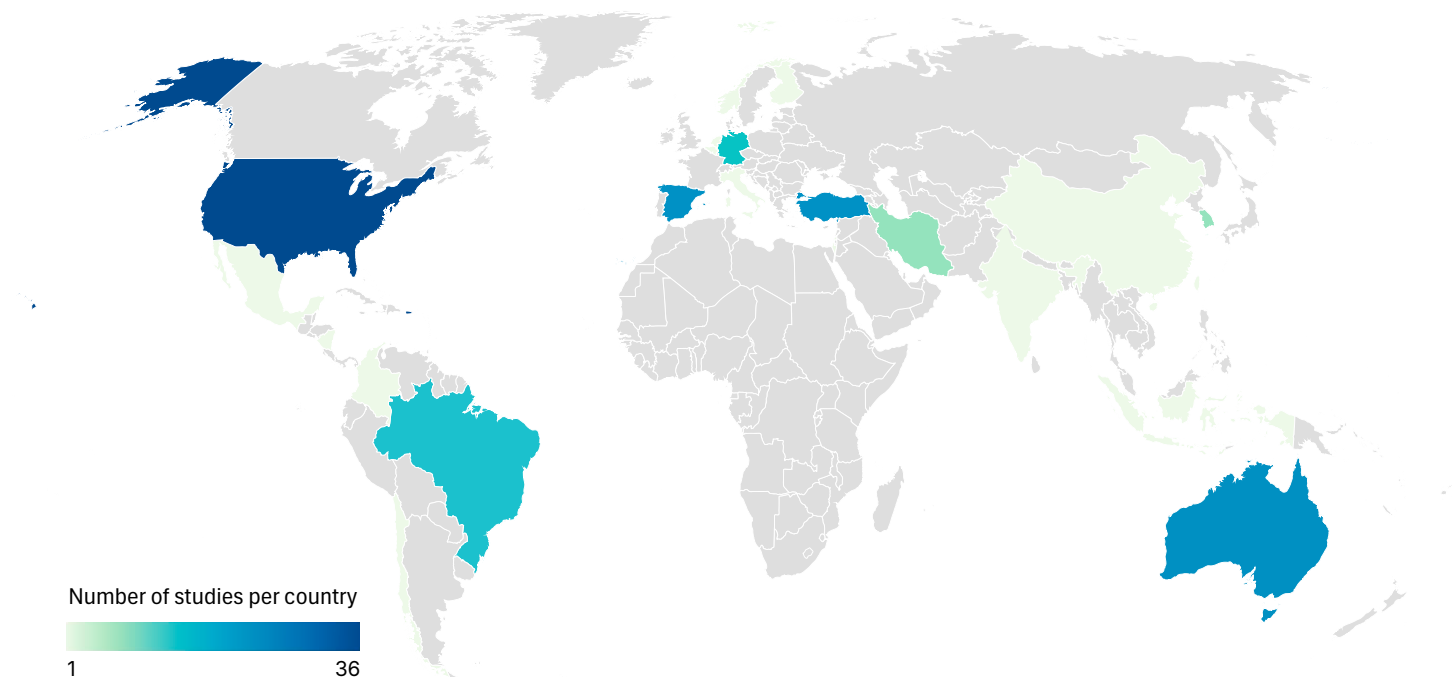
Latin America and the Caribbean

What Works in Behavioral School-Based Violence Prevention?

by Emma Näslund-Hadley, Ariana Grossi, Maria Fernanda Prada, and Haydee Alonzo.

Evidence from 88 impact evaluations shows that schools can play a central role in preventing behavioral forms of violence. School-delivered Behavioral Violence Prevention (BVP) interventions consistently improve students' behavior, emotional regulation, and violence-related attitudes. In this brief, BVP includes two main approaches: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which emphasizes cognitive reframing and self-regulation, and socioemotional and behavioral therapy programs, which build socioemotional skills and positive behavior. Positive impacts are found across regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with effects large enough to be relevant for policy. Integrated and extracurricular models show the strongest results, followed by face-to-face instructional approaches. While evidence is robust for reducing aggression and bullying, important gaps remain, particularly regarding virtual delivery, emotional and attitudinal outcomes, and school-wide or external violence.

Geographic Distribution of the Evidence Base on School-Based BVP



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.



Evidence on School-based BVP is Concentrated in a Few High-income Countries, with Emerging But Still Limited Evidence from Middle-income Regions

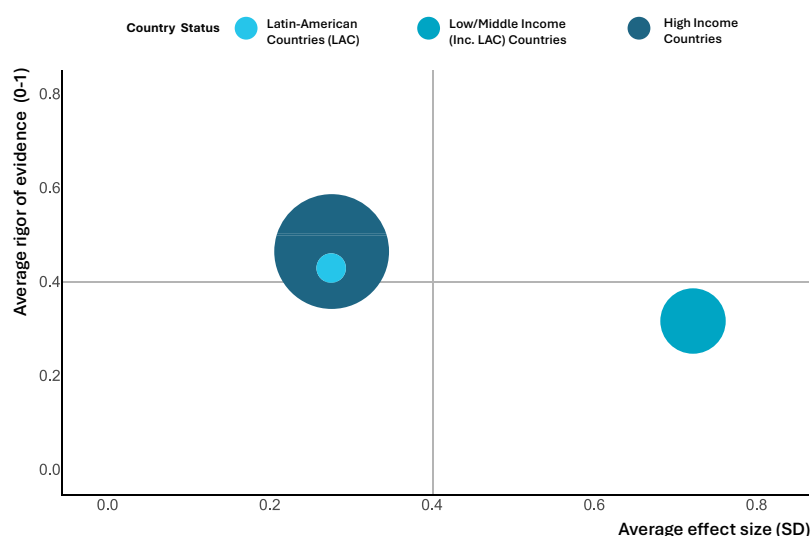
- The United States accounts for the largest number of studies, with additional clusters in Australia, Spain, Turkey, Germany, and the United Kingdom. These countries dominate the evidence-base on how behavioral interventions delivered in schools can reduce violence both inside and outside school walls.
- Latin America shows some growing contributions, including work from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Isolated studies are also found in parts of Eastern and Southern Europe. Although these contributions are valuable, they remain small relative to regional needs.
- The map reveals significant absences in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, and nearly all of the Middle East and North Africa. These gaps limit the ability to generalize findings and highlight the need for more rigorous evaluations in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.



Impacts are Largest in Low- and Middle-income Contexts, but Remain Meaningful in Higher-income and LAC Settings

- Estimated effects are very large (0.72 SD) in Low/Middle income countries, suggesting that behavioral violence prevention interventions may yield especially strong gains where baseline risks and unmet needs are high.
- Average effects are moderate in High income and LAC countries (0.27 SD respectively). In both contexts, effects fall within the range considered educationally meaningful, indicating that BVP programs can generate policy relevant improvements across diverse settings.

Average Effects and Evidence Rigor Across Country Context

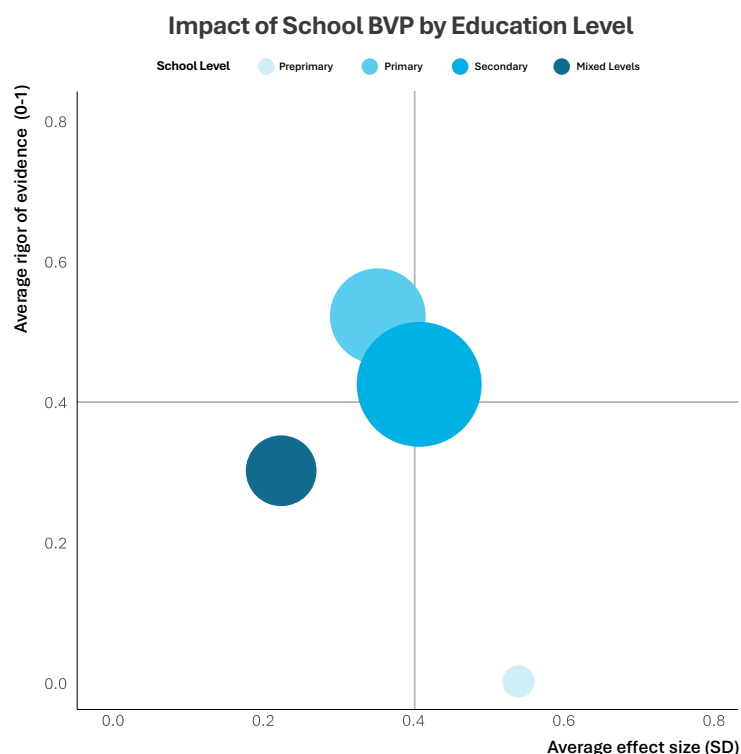


Source: Elaborated by authors

Note for all graphics: 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.



Behavioral Interventions Are Effective Across Primary and Secondary Levels with Emerging Evidence of Larger Impacts in Preprimary



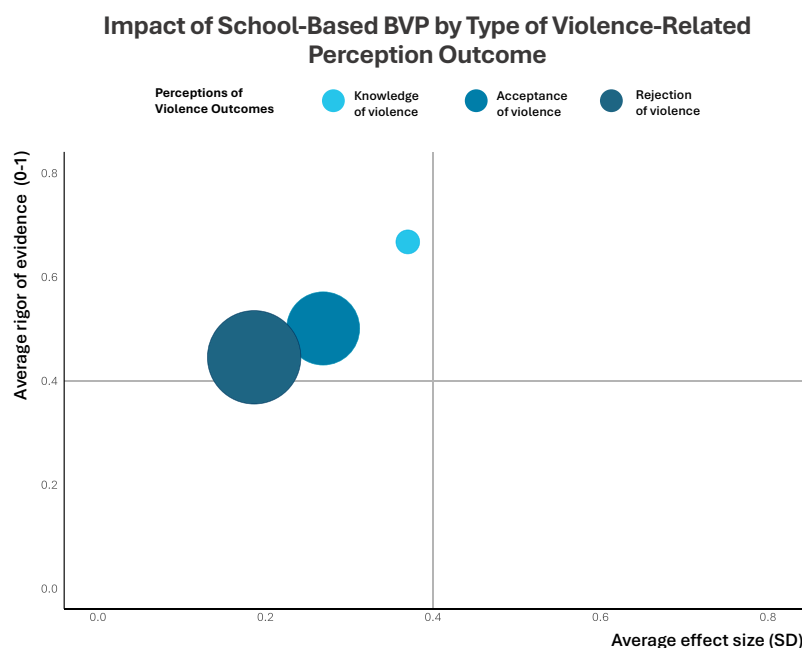
- Both primary and secondary levels show moderate impacts (0.36 SD in primary and 0.41 SD in secondary), indicating that these approaches work consistently throughout compulsory education.
- Early-childhood interventions report large effects (0.55 SD), suggesting strong potential for preventing violent behaviors before they emerge. However, the evidence base remains relatively limited.
- This pattern is consistent with prior literature showing that early childhood interventions - even when not primarily designed to reduce school-related violence - are among the most powerful approaches for preventing violent behaviors later in school and beyond (Bagby et al, 2021).
- Impacts are lower in mixed-level implementations (0.23 SD), pointing to the need for more research to understand how best to tailor interventions beyond the school-age years.

Source: Elaborated by authors



BVP Programs Strongly Reduce Attitudes that Normalize Violence

- The largest effects are found in improving the knowledge and recognition of violence (0.37 SD) suggesting that these interventions have a strong impact on developing the students' ability to understand, identify, and recognize violence.
- Improvements in acceptance of violence (0.27 SD) are also meaningful, reflecting that these interventions are effective in shifting attitudes that normalize violence through challenging harmful beliefs and social norms.
- Impacts on rejecting violent behaviors (0.19 SD) are close to Kraft's (2020) educationally meaningful range, indicating that BVP programs also help strengthen prosocial norms.

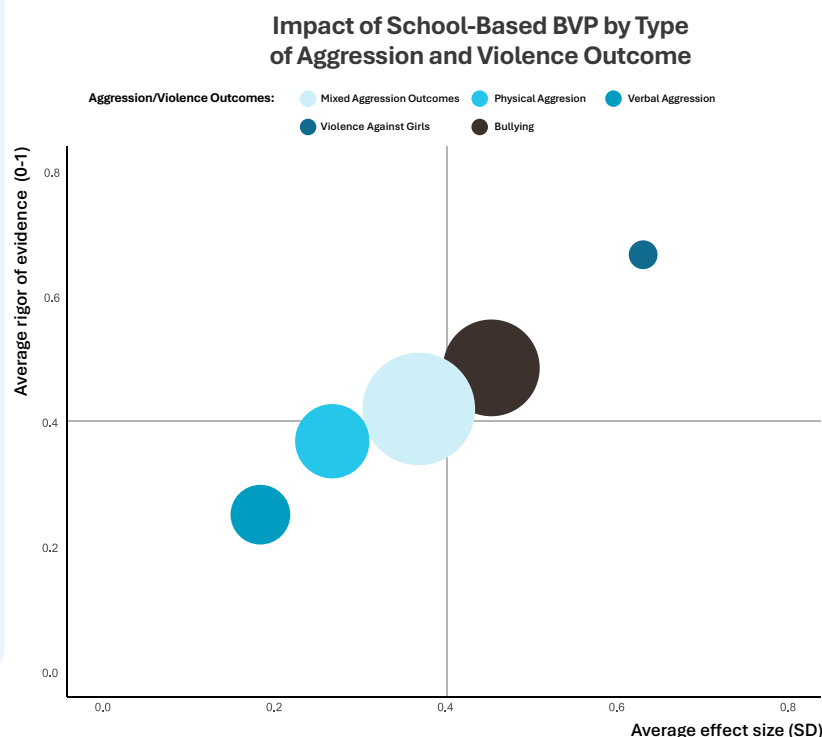


Source: Elaborated by authors

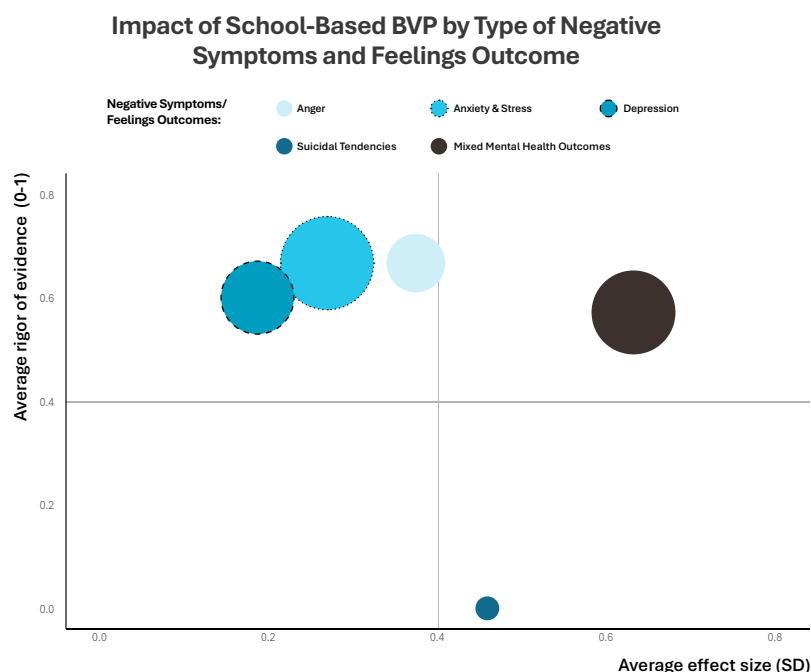


Largest Impacts Are Seen in Reductions of Violence Against Girls, with Meaningful Improvements in Bullying and Mixed Aggression

- BVP programs produce large reductions of Violence Against Girls (0.63 SD), standing out as the strongest effect among aggression and violence outcomes, although based on a smaller number of studies.
- Effects on bullying (0.45 SD) and mixed aggression outcomes (0.37 SD) are close in size, indicating that BVP programs can meaningfully reduce both specific and broader patterns of aggressive behavior.
- Reductions in physical aggression (0.27 SD) and verbal aggression (0.19 SD) are more modest, suggesting these behaviors may be more resistant to change or may require more intensive or sustained intervention to achieve larger impacts.



BVP Improves Emotional and Mental Health Outcomes, with Strongest Reductions in Anger and Mixed Mental Health Issues

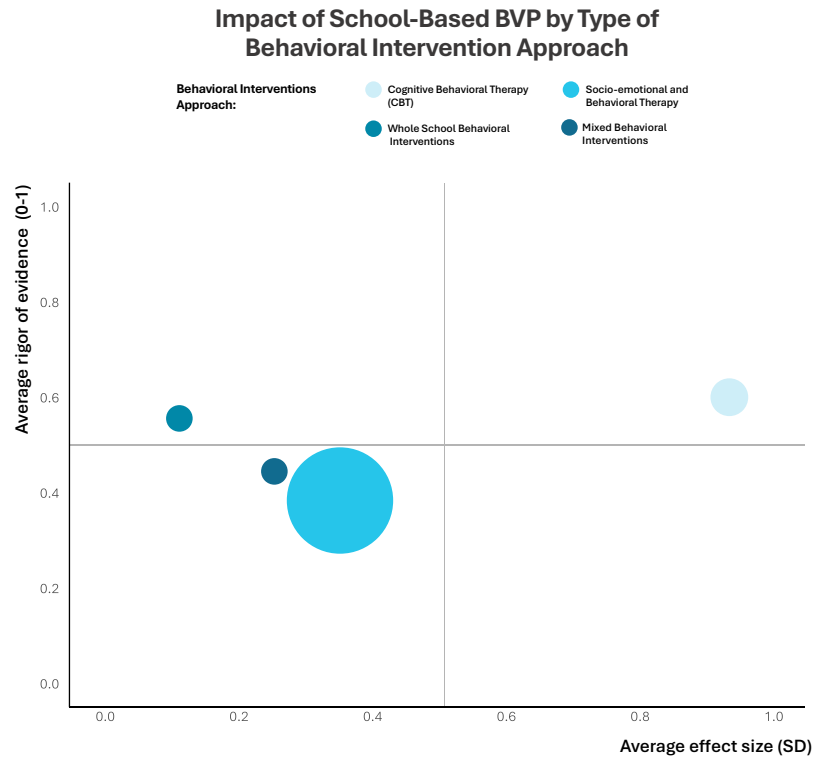


- Programs show clear reductions in anger (0.37 SD), pointing to better emotional control among participants. Large effects are also found for mixed mental health issues (0.63 SD).
- Effects on anxiety and stress (0.27 SD) and depression (0.19 SD) are modest but consistently positive, suggesting that BVP programs can contribute to improvements in students' emotional wellbeing, even when these outcomes are not the main focus of the intervention.
- A reduction in suicidal tendencies (0.45 SD) is promising, but this finding is based on very limited evidence and should be treated as preliminary.



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Shows the Largest Impacts on Violence-Related Outcomes, While Socioemotional and Behavioral Programs Deliver Moderate and Consistent Effects

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy produces the largest effects (0.94 SD), showing that structured, skills-based strategies for emotional regulation and cognitive reframing are particularly powerful in reducing violence-related behaviors in school settings.
- Interventions that combine Socio-emotional and Behavioral Therapy also show solid impacts (0.35 SD) and constitute the most commonly evaluated models, indicating they are effective and broadly applicable across contexts.
- Whole school models have modest effects (0.11 SD) and mixed approaches show moderate impacts (0.26 SD). According to Kraft's (2020) benchmarks, these magnitudes remain educationally meaningful but indicate that broader or multi-common designs may require stronger implementation to achieve larger gains.

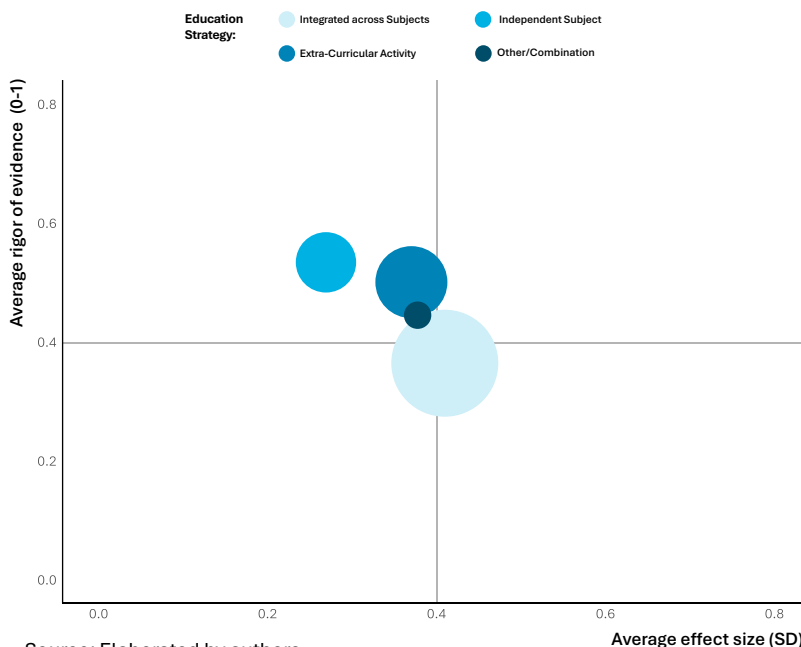


Source: Elaborated by authors



BVP Can Be Delivered Through Multiple Educational Strategies, All of Which Show Positive and Similar Impacts on Reducing School Violence

Impact of School-Based BVP by Type of Education Strategy



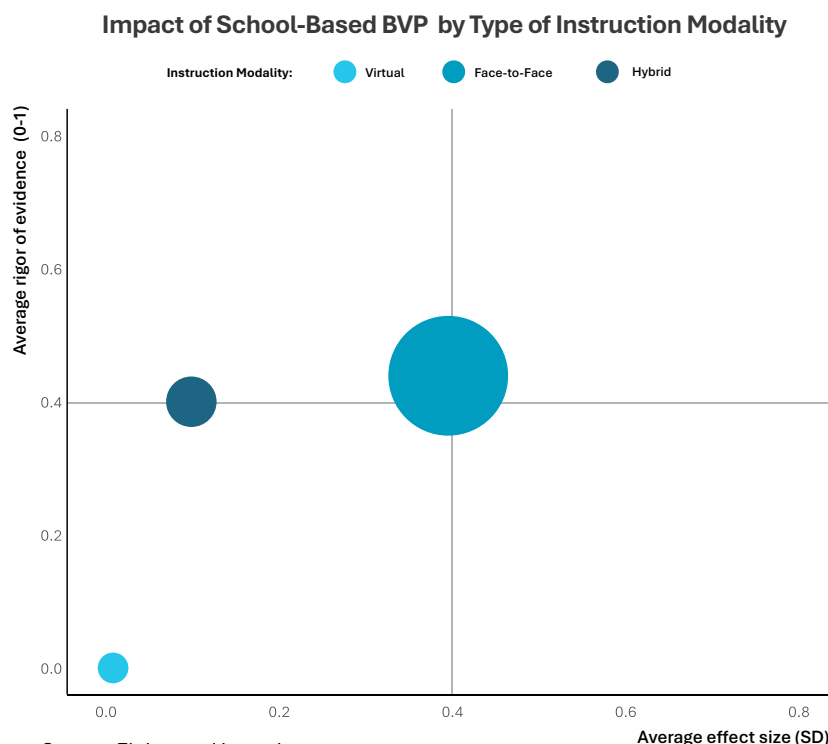
Source: Elaborated by authors

- BVP interventions integrated across subjects and delivered during regular school hours show the largest average effects (0.41 SD), suggesting that embedding violence prevention activities within the formal curriculum is the most effective approach.
- At the same time, those implemented outside regular class time produce slightly lower average effects (0.37), suggesting that dedicated, structured spaces for practice and reflection may also offer modest added benefits, while overall effectiveness remains comparable across delivery strategies.
- Teaching content as an independent subject shows very similar but marginally lower effects (0.27 SD), suggesting that repeated exposure and reinforcement across contexts may provide modest added benefits.



In-Person Modality Works Best for Behavioral Violence Prevention

- In-person behavioral violence prevention programs show solid effects (0.40 SD), indicating that direct interaction, modeling, and practice are important components of effective implementation.
- Programs that combine in-person sessions with digital or remote elements show smaller impacts (0.10 SD), suggesting that blended approaches can work well when they preserve meaningful face-to-face engagement.
- The single fully virtual estimate shows almost no effect (0.01 SD), highlighting that behavioral interventions may require interpersonal dynamics and relational practice that are difficult to replicate in online-only formats.



References:

Kraft, M. A. (2020). Interpreting Effect Sizes of Education Interventions. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 241–253.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20912798>

Bagby, E., Murray, N., Felix, E., Liuzzi, S., Meuth Alldredge, J., Ingwersen, N., Abarcas, P., & Aponte, A. (2021). *Evidence review: The effect of education programs on violence, crime, and related outcomes*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Web: <https://cima.iadb.org> | Contact: education@iadb.org | Publication date: 2026

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.