

Summary of individual study: Karmaliani (2020)

Skinny cell(s) in which this study appears:

Intervention = Prevention; Outcome = Adult Perpetrator: Maltreatment Behaviours

Summary: Play-based intervention delivered in secondary schools can lead to less violent discipline against children.

The summary is based on **Karmaliani et al. (2020)** 'Right to Play's intervention to reduce peer violence among children in public schools in Pakistan: a cluster-randomized controlled trial.'

Evidence status	Low risk of bias	A manualized play-based intervention delivered by coaches in school can reduce the incidence of harsh punishment experienced by children at school and home.
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The summary in brief

A play-based intervention using a standardised manual delivered by trained coaches in secondary schools in Pakistan is evaluated in this RCT. The intervention is developed by Right to Play, an international NGO that focuses on play-based programmes to improve outcomes for children. After each play activity session, children are encouraged to reflect on how the activity makes them feel and to relate it to their lives at school and home. The intervention in this case was delivered to 20 public middle schools in a large district in Pakistan; 20 other schools which did not receive the intervention were the control group.

Intervention activities lasted two years, during which over 120 sessions were delivered to students. Parents and teachers received regular information sessions on child rights, gender equity, and positive discipline.

Children in the programme said they experienced less violent discipline by their teachers and at home than did children in the control group. The reductions were more pronounced for girls. Peer violence went down for intervention participants – both committing violence and being a victim. Depression outcomes also improved for students in the intervention compared to the control group.

Type of study: RCT. Peer-reviewed journal article.

The intervention

Right To Play is an international non-profit organization that uses sports and play-based programmes to empower children and youth facing adversity. The organization aims to promote holistic development,

including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills, through engaging activities and games. Right To Play operates in various countries around the world, working with local communities and partners to deliver programs that help children learn essential life skills, build resilience, and improve their overall well-being. Their interventions often focus on areas such as education, child protection, gender equality, and health promotion.

In this study, coaches employed by Right to Play delivered the intervention to students in grades 6-8 (ages 12-14) attending public middle schools in the Hyderabad district of Sindh province in Pakistan. The intervention includes 103 play-based learning activities. Coaches pick an activity, each with its own goal, from a manual. Once the play is complete, a three-step discussion called 'Reflect-Connect-Apply' takes place. Students are encouraged to talk about how the activity made them feel and to apply it to other aspects of life.

The intervention was implemented over a two year period with 120 sessions for each class: two sessions on average every week. There were also information sessions for parents and training sessions for teachers on topics such as child rights, gender equality, and positive discipline.

The trial

Approximately 1,750 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from 40 schools participated in the intervention or were in the control group. There were more girls than boys in each of the groups. Students were surveyed for outcomes before the intervention began, six months into the programme, one year, and at two years when the programme ended. Data from almost 80% of students were available at all the time points.

The researchers examined if the intervention reduced peer-violence (both victimization and perpetration) and depression among students. They also measured other outcomes such as how often corporal punishment and punishment at home happened (as reported by students).

How is the programme meant to work? The theory of change

No specific theory for this intervention is mentioned. However, the program uses various theories in areas such as social, cognitive, child development, and experiential learning. Its main emphasis is on promoting physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development through sports and games. The program is based on the belief that children learn by exploring and reinforcing new ideas and behaviours, and for long-lasting effects to occur, interventions need to be continuous. An important aspect of the program is its commitment to promoting gender equality, which is incorporated throughout and aims to empower girls by providing opportunities for participation and discussion.

Did the intervention work?

Yes. Students in the intervention group reported statistically significantly less corporal punishment (a secondary outcome in the study) at school compared to students in the control group. Girls reported a larger drop in experiencing corporal punishment. Harsh discipline at home (another secondary outcome) over the last few weeks before the survey was also reduced.

The primary outcomes were peer violence victimization, peer violence perpetration, and depression for boys and girls. The study shows girls benefitted far more than boys through the program. The reductions in peer violence victimisation in the intervention and control groups respectively were 33% against 28% for boys and 58% versus 21% for girls. In the intervention and control arms, the reductions in peer violence perpetration were 25% versus 11% for boys and 56% versus 28% for girls. The mean depression ratings decreased for girls (9.5% vs. 5.6% intervention and control) and boys (7.2% vs. 4.8% intervention and control).

Adverse outcomes: There were no reports of serious adverse events.

Has the intervention been implemented at scale?

Not quite. Although 40 out of 55 secondary schools in a major city district were enrolled, this was principally designed as a research study.

What does the intervention cost?

The study does not report any data on cost.

Generalisability

Likely generalisable to other secondary schools in South Asia, other LMICs, and even globally. This intervention is structured and manualized, so it could potentially be implemented in most secondary school settings around the world. The programme has already been translated and adapted for different settings. In Pakistan, where the NGO has worked since 2008, the material has been translated into Urdu and Sindhi. Although the programme has been tested and refined over 20 years across 18 countries, this was the first time that the programme was evaluated for long-term impact on children, i.e., two-years.

How reliable is the evidence?

Very. The study is rated as having a **low risk of bias**.

Overall risk of bias	Randomisation process	Deviations from intended interventions	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result
Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

Cells in which this study appears:

The study relates to both prevention and disclosure:

- Intervention = prevention; Outcome = Child Safety: child maltreatment occurrence/recurrence
- Intervention = prevention; Outcome = Child wellbeing: child mental health
- Intervention = prevention; Outcome = Adult perpetrator: maltreatment behaviours
- Intervention = prevention; Outcome = Child/youth offender: maltreatment behaviours