Prevention / Child Wellbeing: Knowledge and Awareness

School-based sexual abuse prevention interventions improve children's knowledge and awareness on prevention concepts and actions.

Evidence status	Low risk of bias	Strong evidence that sexual abuse prevention interventions increase children's knowledge and awareness on sexual abuse prevention concepts and actions. Even though most of the studies in the cell are rated as 'moderate risk of bias,' the number of studies and consistency of results warrants high confidence in the findings.

The summary in brief

This synthesis is of the cell with the largest number of studies (by far) in the EGM. It shows clearly that the bulk of evidence for preventing child maltreatment is school-based interventions delivered in the classroom, mostly about sexual abuse and mainly to young children. The aim is to teach them the concepts of sexual abuse prevention and empower them to recognise, avoid, and report sexual abuse (if it happens).

These programmes are usually short in duration (typically a few weeks) and delivered during regular school hours by trained personnel (often teachers). The studies of these programmes measure knowledge and awareness about sexual abuse prevention gained by the children after training - compared to a control group that did not receive the training.

Most studies show improvements in knowledge and awareness immediately after training, but these gains can fade in the long term.

Contents of the cell

This cell includes one 63 primary studies (and 1 paper) conducted over a long period (Blumberg 1991, Bustamante 2019, Daigneault 2015, Edwards 2019, Feldmann 2018, Krahe 2009, Ratto 1990, Taylor 2010, Wurtele 1992a,b, Barron 2013, Cecen-Erogul 2013, Chen 2012, Citak 2017, Conte 1985, Crowley 1989, Daigneault 2012, Dake 2003, del Campo Sanchez 2006, Grendel 1991, Harvey 1988, Hazzard 1991, Jin 2017, Oldfield 1996, Pulido 2015, Saslawsky 1985, Telljohann 1997, Tutty 1997, White 2018, Wolfe 1986, Wurtele 1986, Zhang 2014, Baker 2012, Czerwinski 2018, Dhooper 1995, Dryden 2014, Hebert 2001, Hillenbrand-Gunn 2012, Weatherley 2012, Kenny 2012, Kraizer 1991, Neherta 2017, Kolko 1987, Kolko 1989, MacIntyre 1991, Snyder 1986, Taal 1997, Warden 1997, White 2019, Jewkes 2019, Nickerson 2019, Jones 2020, Huang 2020, Juarez Diaz 2021, Thompson 2021, Weeks 2021, McElearney 2021, Bright 2022, Kang 2020, Urbann 2020, Kiziltepe 2021, and Edwards 2021).

In some cases, the same intervention was tested in different populations. For example, the effects of the ESPACE sexual abuse prevention workshop were tested in three different populations in various cities of Quebec, Canada (Hebert 2001, Daigneault 2012, Daigneault 2015).

This type of intervention, i.e., a sexual (or other abuse) prevention programme taught in the classroom for a limited time, is by far the most prevalent in the EGM. More than half of the studies in this cell come from the US with the rest from Canada, the UK, Europe, Australia, Central America, Africa, and East Asia. There are no studies from South Asia or South America. Earlier studies are almost exclusively from high-income countries while recent studies also have representation from low- and middle-income studies.

The interventions

All the interventions in this cell seem to be school-based prevention programmes, and about sexual abuse specifically. Some studies also focused on preventing other forms of abuse such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse.

Most programmes target students in middle childhood (6-11 years) although a few also included early childhood students (2-5 years) and adolescents. When adolescents are targeted, the programme is adjusted to include topics relevant to that age group like dating violence or promoting bystander action (on witnessing inappropriate behaviour).

Teachers are often part of the intervention: often the intervention is delivered by them in their classrooms. In some cases, parents were also involved.

The interventions typically consist of classroom-based education aimed at increasing the knowledge of young children on prevention concepts (related to sexual abuse) and providing them with skills to identify, avoid and respond to sexual abuse (and other forms of abuse). The interventions are generally offered over a short duration (a few weeks to a few months). Intervention activities are tailored to the children's age: programmes for younger children often include roleplay and simulations of inappropriate and appropriate interactions with adults.

Who delivers the intervention?

The interventions are delivered by researchers (who often have developed the programme and are looking to test whether it works or not), by personnel from community-based organisations; teachers in the classroom; or in some cases by older students (high school students teaching elementary school students).

Have the interventions been implemented at scale?

There are some examples of large-scale programmes. For example, *Stay Safe* (MacIntyre 1999) has been delivered in most primary schools in Ireland. However, most studies are evaluations from a small number of schools or classrooms.

What do the interventions cost?

While cost information is not explicitly provided in most studies (only one study seems to have provided this – see below), classroom-based prevention programmes are generally considered to be low-cost since they are of short duration and can be incorporated within regular school scheduling.

The *Kids Learning About Safety (KLAS)* programme for Latino preschoolers and their families in South Florida (Kenny 2012) reported an operating budget of $150,000 for one year. The programme included 100 families (one child and one parent participant per family) but some families attended very few sessions. "The cost per group (averaging 10 child and 10 adult participants) is estimated to be $7,000 (including indirect costs and salaries for the principal investigator, counsellors, and research assistant, as well as program materials, supplies, and incentive/milestone gifts). The cost per participant was approximately $350."

Do the interventions work in improving child knowledge and awareness?

Absolutely. *Almost all studies report that children's knowledge and awareness of concepts and actions on sexual abuse prevention significantly improved* after participation in the programme compared to the control group. This is the most robust and consistent finding we have in the EGM for any outcome.

A few caveats need to be kept in mind:

1. Increased knowledge and awareness are intermediate outcomes and we do not know if increasing knowledge and awareness reduces *actual* incidence of child abuse / maltreatment.
2. Studies use a wide range of scales (some validated, some not) to measure knowledge and awareness. Since we have not conducted a meta-analysis in the EGM, i.e., a statistical method to pool effect sizes from different scales to get a common effect size, we are not able to quantify the size of the effect.
3. These interventions rather put the burden of prevention on children themselves. They aim to train and prepare children so that they can recognise, avoid, and report abusive situations. Training childcare providers or school administrators to shore up institutional responses to protect children are also important to help children avoid abuse.
4. Students' knowledge and awareness improves in the short-term with these programmes, but the effect probably fades over time. Repeated or refresher trainings might be needed to maintain knowledge and awareness.

Are the results generalisable?

Yes. The number of studies and the consistency of results indicate that results may be generalisable.

How reliable is the evidence?

Pretty reliable. While most studies are rated as 'moderate risk of bias,' the number of studies and the consistency of findings suggests that the evidence is quite reliable.

Risk of Bias for Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs)

Study (Author and year)	Overall risk of bias	Randomised process	Deviations from intended interventions	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result

Blumberg 1991	High risk of bias	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	High risk	Some concerns
Bustamante 2019	High risk of bias	Low risk	High risk	High risk	Some concerns	Some concerns
Daigneault 2015	High Risk of Bias	Some concerns	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	Some concerns
Edwards 2019	High risk of bias	Some concerns	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	Some concerns
Feldmann 2018	High risk of bias	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	High risk	Some concerns
Jones 2020	High risk of bias	High risk	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk
Juarez Diaz 2021	High risk of bias	Some concerns	High risk	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk
Krahe 2009	High risk of bias	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	High risk	Some concerns
Ratto 1990	High risk of bias	Some concerns	High risk	Some concerns	High risk	Some concerns
Taylor 2010	High risk of bias	Low risk	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	Some concerns
Tutty 1997	High risk of bias	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	High risk	Some concerns
Wurtele 1992b	High risk of bias	Some concerns	High Risk	High risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Kraizer 1988	High risk of bias	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	High risk	High risk

Barron 2013	Some concerns	Some Concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Bright 2022	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk
Cecen-Erogul 2013	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Chen 2012	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns
Citak 2018	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Conte 1985	Some concerns	Low risk	High risk	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Crowley 1989	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns
Daigneault 2012	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Dake 2003	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns
Del Campo Sanchez 2006	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Fryer 1987	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns
Grendel 1991	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Harvey 1988	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns

Hazzard 1991	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns
Jewkes 2019	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk
Jin 2017	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns
McElearney 2021	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk
Oldfield 1996	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Pulido 2015	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Saslawsky 1976	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Telljohann 1997	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns
Thompson 2021	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk
Weeks 2021	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk
White 2018	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Wolfe 1986	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some Concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Wurtele 1986	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns

Wurtele 1992a	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	Low risk	Some concerns
Zhang 2014	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some Concerns	Some concerns
White 2019	Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk
Nickerson 2019	Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk
Huang, Cui 2020	Low risk of bias	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

Risk of Bias for Quasi-Experimental Designs (QEDs)

Study (Author and year)	Overall risk of bias	Confounding	Selection bias	Bias in intervention classification	Deviation from intended intervention	Missing outcome data	Measurement of the outcome	Selection of the reported result
Baker 2012	Moderate risk of bias	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low
Czerwinski 2018	Moderate risk of bias	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Dhooper 1995	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Dryden 2014	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	Low
Edwards 2021	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low

Hebert 2001	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Hillenbrand-Gunn 2012	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Kang 2020	Moderate risk of bias	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low
Urbann 2020	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
Weatherley 2012	Moderate risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low
Kenny 2012	Serious risk of bias	Serious	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Kraizer 1991	Serious risk of bias	Serious	Serious	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low
Neherta 2017	Serious risk of bias	Moderate	Serious	Moderate	Moderate	No info.	No info.	Low
Kiziltepe 2021	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Kolko 1987	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Kolko 1989	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
MacIntyre 1991	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Synder 1986	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Taal	Low risk of	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

1997	bias							
Warden 1997	Low risk of bias	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low