



WITS: programs that target children who are victimized need to address school and classroom factors

What is this research about?

There are several programs that seek to reduce the number of victimized children. These programs address social competency skills related to a child's level of development at an early age and beyond. They also attempt to connect with services and curriculum that can engage children, and adults such as parents and teachers. School-wide and classroom level aggression can affect the success of these programs. But many of them focus on the deficits of individual children rather than school and classroom factors that lead to victimized peers. Can classroom and school-wide factors influence children's reports of being victimized? How can a school-wide victimization program influence these classroom and school-wide factors?

What did the researcher do?

A short term, longitudinal study was held with 432 Grade 1 children, from 44 classrooms in 17 schools. Parental consent was received to collect data at 3 points: at the start and end of Grade 1, and at the end of Grade 2.

During this time, the schools implemented the WITS program (Walk away; Ignore; Talk, use words not fists; Seek help) with all students and teachers. Students who received parental consent self-reported their prosocial acts and

What you need to know:

Prevention programs like WITS can affect the extent to which children are victimized among peers. The program resulted in a decrease in self-reported feelings of being victimized from children. It also showed an increase in children's social competence from teacher reports.

how often they were victimized physically, relationally, or by peers. The researchers used the Social Experiences Questionnaire to assess their responses. Social competence, emotional and behaviour problems were assessed from teacher reports and measured by the Early School Behaviour Rating Scale. The researchers also observed school levels of poverty by noting the number of students whose families received income assistance.

At the end of each grade, teachers also reported how often they had included the WITS program into their classroom over the last 3 months. This included counting how often they:

- Read and talked about books related to WITS;
- Held a WITS activity in their class;
- Commended students for using WITS;

- Displayed student WITS projects;
- Welcomed a police liaison visit to their class.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found 3 factors that affected individual, classroom and school-wide events of being victimized.

- 1) Behaviour problems: aggressive classroom settings influenced children's reports of being victimized.
- 2) Emotional problems and social competence: emotional problems in the classroom can increase relational victimization. Levels of social competence also predicted increased reports of being physically and relationally victimized.
- 3) Poverty and school programs: classroom levels of being physically victimized were linked to higher levels of school poverty. It also increased in the absence of a prevention program

The researchers found that a school-wide approach created effective outcomes from the WITS program. It improved social competence and reduced the amount of children who were victimized by peers. It also created a positive environment where children could build interpersonal skills with peers.

How can you use this research?

Policy makers may find the study's outcomes useful. It sheds insight on future efforts to initiate school and board wide programs that seek to address issues like bullying. It may also offer ideas on how parents and community partners can be engaged in these projects.

Educators and families may also find this research helpful. It offers suggestions on how

classrooms and other child spaces can apply a unified message against being victimized. It also observes certain strategies that can be taken to build these spaces.

About the Researchers

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