Peer-Focused Interventions to Reduce Bullying

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Approaches to Bullying Prevention

1. Efforts to build social competencies in the aggressor/bully
   * Individual
   * Group
   * Deviant peer-only group

2. Efforts to change the peer environment and culture to reduce reinforcement of bullying
Peer-Focused Interventions

1. Technology to build social skills has improved.
2. But, most policy is not individual skill-building.
3. Rather, to place deviant child with deviant peers.

   **Mental health**
   - group therapy, milieu therapy
   - 52% of expenditures; $6 billion/year

   **Education**
   - tracking, special education, in-school suspensions, alternative schools

   **Juvenile justice**
   - training schools, boot camps, incarceration
   - 93% of expenditures, $4.6 billion/year

Rationale for Peer-Group Interventions

1. Less costly

2. Affords role-playing and practice

3. Can manipulate peer group reinforcement

4. Helps child feel comfortable

5. Common in other domains, such as AA
Peer-Focused Interventions in Juvenile Justice

1. Intervention efficacy is generally positive but modest:
   Average effect size in juvenile justice = .10

2. On average, *group* interventions are one third less effective:
   Average effect size = .07

3. Many group interventions yield net adverse effects:
   42% of prevention and 22% of probation programs

4. Individual interventions are more effective & cost-beneficial

Generalized Findings in Peer-Focused Interventions to Reduce Bullying

An Experimental Test of Individual Vs. Deviant Peer-Group Administration: Coping Power

Skill-building program for 8-14-year-old aggressive children
360 aggressive fourth-grade children
20 schools randomly assigned to:
   ICP: Individually-delivered Coping Power
   GCP: Group-delivered Coping power
Measurement: pre-, post-, and one-year follow-up

Findings from Coping Power Experiment

At immediate post-treatment, findings are mixed.

Tendency for homogenization:

Highly aggressive children become less aggressive
Less aggressive children become more aggressive

Divergence at one-year follow-up.

One-Year Impact of Individual Vs. Deviant Peer-Group Administration of Coping Power

Ways to Mitigate Iatrogenic Effects of Deviant Peer Groups

Strong training for experienced adult group leaders
Use of behavioral reinforcement strategies
Teaching strategies that emphasize clear instructions
Emphasize a peer-culture norm of non-deviance
Limit unstructured time with peers
Constant monitoring of “hot spots” where peers congregate
Limit interaction opportunities out of groups by mixing different schools and communities
Short duration
Changing the Peer Culture to Reduce Bullying

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

The Supporting Early Adolescent Learning and Social Success (SEALS) Model

-- Teacher training and directed consultation in:

• Social dynamics management
• Enhancing academic engagement
• Classroom behavior management


Randomized Trial of SEALS

28 middle schools randomly assigned to SEALS or Control

Findings:

SEALS teachers more accurate in understanding peer affiliations
SEALS teachers rated by observers as better managers of classroom
SEALS students made greater academic achievement gains
SEALS students value school more and feel school belonging
SEALS students report more supportive school and peer context
High-risk students in SEALS schools interact more with academically-productive and non-bully peers

Recommendation 1: *Ineffective programs, placements, and treatments that aggregate deviant peers should be avoided whenever possible.*

- Training schools, boot camps, Scared Straight, Guided Group Interaction
- Gang Resistance Education And Training Program
- Midnight Basketball, “hang-outs,” and community centers
- Non-structured after-school programs
- Three Strikes Law-mandated longer prison terms
Recommendation 2: Effective Alternatives to Deviant Peer-Group Placement Should Be Encouraged.

- **Individual therapies**
  - Functional Family Therapy (FFT)
  - Multi-systemic Therapy (MST)
  - Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)

- **Therapeutic courts**

- **Early prevention programs and discipline practices**
  - High/Scope Perry Preschool Project
  - Fast Track and LIFT

- **Programs that combine high- and low-risk youths**
  - 4H, School-based extracurriculars, Boys/Girls Clubs, scouts, church activities

- **Universal peer-culture interventions**
  - Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)
  - SEALS

- **Job Corps and individual skills training**

- **Efforts to disperse rather than increase gang cohesiveness**

- Avoid placing highly susceptible youth.
  (i.e., slightly delinquent early adolescents)
- Avoid placing deviant youths with older, more deviant peers or peers with similar problems from same community.
- Employ experienced leaders and provide training.
- Create highly structured environments with little free time.
- Monitor behavior closely.
- Keep placements to short duration.

- The record should include description of placement environment.
- The record should include description of peers.
- Evaluate impact.