



# RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

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The role of community-based organizations in school-based violence prevention programming: An action research project.



## What you need to know

While schools are a key setting for violence prevention efforts, school-based efforts alone may be fragmented and uncoordinated with broader community violence prevention initiatives. Enhanced coordination between local funders, schools and community-based organizations would allow for a more systemic approach that better leverages community and school resources.

## What is the research about?

This action research project emerged from the desire of researchers, community-based organizations, school systems and funders to explore the specific challenges and opportunities faced by local non-profit community based organizations when offering school-based violence prevention programming (VPP) for children and youth. The aim was to identify any gaps and assess the potential for a collective agenda moving forward.

## What did the researchers do?

To recruit participants, researchers used convenience and snowballing sampling. Twenty five individuals were recruited to participate in the study and these participants included executive directors, program managers, program directors and community development workers. The participants represented 24 distinct violence prevention programs.

Participants were interviewed by research assistants during September and October 2012. All research assistants followed an interview guide that was developed by members of the research team. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews and develop themes. Finally, members of the research team partook in the final discussion and interpretation of the data.



## What did the researchers find?

This study identified three main themes. The first theme was a lack of continuity and consistency with schools. The required elements for successful program delivery (i.e., training for staff, integrating into the curriculum) were not consistently followed. Each program was designed with a goal in mind, but this did not always align with the schools' priorities. Likewise, each organization had its own philosophy and approach to programming, making consistency amongst schools unlikely. Ideally, these programs should be delivered in a consistent format to all youth, but in reality, delivery is unorganized and unpredictable.

Next, violence prevention programs are designed to serve the mainstream (i.e., regular school attendees). Diverse populations (i.e., immigrants, incarcerated youth) have unique needs that are not addressed by violence prevention programs. This leads to challenges when delivering violence prevention programs to diverse youth.

The final theme was that many believed that enhanced coordination between interest groups (i.e., schools, funders, etc.) would allow for a more systematic approach. A more coordinated approach to violence prevention could better support the achievement of positive outcomes for children and youth, including healthier relationships.

## How can you use this research?

A number of important issues were identified during this study. Addressing these issues is important to improve the efficacy of current efforts, inform future research, and support others that may be interested in examining the potential for coordination.

To facilitate the meaningful knowledge transfer and mobilization of evidence-based programs, future research should engage community-based organizations when designing and implementing new programs for diverse youth. Additionally, when it comes to “difficult to reach youth” (e.g., youth involved with the justice system), more research is needed to ensure effective engagement with VPP.



## About this summary:

This summary was prepared by Keri Rempel, a research assistant for the HOPE Lab at the University of Calgary. The HOPELab collaborates with a number of community and research partners with the goal of building healthy relationships as a foundation for child and adolescent well-being.

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