Behavior interventions

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on behavior interventions in the Arab World.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of behavior interventions on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on behavior interventions in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of behavior interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Behavior interventions seek to improve students' achievement by reducing challenging behaviors, including aggression, violence, bullying, substance abuse and general anti-social activities. Many studies published in the Arab world examined reasons of negative behaviors and suggested ways to improve them. No studies to date, however, investigated the impact of behavior interventions on student achievement. Most studies examined the level of behavior on educational attainment. While level of behaviors ranged between inattention, hyperactivity, emotional problems, conduct problems, and being pro-social, results of a mixed method study suggested an association of hyperactivity with students' educational attainment on mathematics, reading comprehension, and spelling for grades 4 and 5 students in Kuwait (Almurtaji, 2016)

Physical violence in particular has drawn researchers' attention due to its impact on students' well-being and its link to attrition rates. Shaikh et al. (2020)

investigated the individual and social correlates for being involved in a physical fight amongst 3637 adolescents in Kuwait. Quantitative data revealed that school-attending adolescents were involved in physical fight because they were a victim of bullying. Furthermore, adolescents who missed school were more likely to be involved in physical fight and those who are violent may be inclined to have suicide tendencies. Males were almost three times more likely to have been involved in physical fights than females.

Furthermore, males in grades five and sixth reported suffering from various forms of bullying including physical, verbal, and indirect or social bullying (Ali & Abdullah, 2019).

A majority of these students whether coming from low-socio economic status and from large extended families tend to be victims of bullying. Authors discussed that due to the size of the family and the employment status, parents were unable to follow up on their children's behavior and teach them the proper ways to deal with issues including anger. Those parents the author concluded were not successful in teaching their children the necessary social skills needed to function well in society. In addition, being bullied was negatively correlated with academic performance of adolescent students (Shaheen et al., 2018). That is why, researchers in Iraq and Jordan highlighted the need for school-family partnerships to address any bullying behavior and for schools to take this issue more seriously by creating policies and taking part in bringing forth national laws and legislations to support schoolwide implementation of antibullying programs to deal with bullying or other aggressive behaviors in students. It is as equally important to ensure the existence of a well-trained counselor in each school to work with students on equipping them with skills to help them resolve conflicts between each other and help them navigate through their emotional and psychological challenges (Al Ali, 2017; Ali & Abudullah, 2019).

In a recent study, Alotaibi (2019) examined the effects of cyber bullying and cyber harassment on students' educational performance in Saudi schools. The author used structural equation modeling to show that the exogenous factors of attitude, social norms, perceived behavioral control, social media use, absence of parental controls, and lack of regulations were all directly, significantly, and positively

related to the endogenous factor of behavioral intention. Findings of this study showed that students who were cyber bullied felt fear and sadness which affected their academic performance and made them reluctant to go to school. Cyber bullying made them lose concertation during lessons. A majority of high school students in Saudi Arabia reported that they trust their parents and relatives to control and guide their behavior online and count on their support in case of such incidents. As for schools, they are recommended to establish laws and regulations and programs to increase awareness of bullying in general and the reasons behind it (Alotaibi, 2019).

To this end, al-Khurafi and al-Qahtani (2016) revealed the importance of schools' therapeutic programs to reduce secondary school students' aggressive behavior. Integrating group counseling programs in schools showed positive results on improving male students (n=26) behaviors when compared to the control group comprising students (n=26) who did not attend this program (Salameh, 2019). Results of another experimental study showed statistically significant differences in reducing bullying behavior and improving social care of the experimental group through attending counseling programs. These students were a sample of male/female from the 8th, 9th and 10th grades from four private schools in Jordan who attended school counselling trainings that were focused on on developing relationships between students (Hamdi & al-Shar'ah, 2017). Schools which implemented the group counseling approach succeeded in reducing violence among students particularly in middle school (Sulaimani & A'anno, 2014). Supportive school environments nurture positive behavior among students and reduces violence. Supporting students emotional well-being is one way to manage their behavior, particularly among adolescents (Sahli et al., 2018). Females going through the puberty phase tend to struggle more than males due the emotional and biological changes involved (Osman et al., 2019). To this end, teachers must be able to spot and identify students' problems and be aware of challenges they face in schools in order to better manage their classroom (Haddad, 2019). Teachers must be aware of how to cope with inappropriate behaviors and ways to maintain appropriate behaviors. For instance, teachers who encourage peer support, in the form of having close friends in classroom, have reduced adolescent students' involvement in fighting behavior (Shaikh et al., 2020). Building relationships between teachers, schools and parents is another

intervention aiming to increase parental involvement and keep parents aware of their children behavior in school (Sahli et al., 2018).

Thus, strengthening parent-child relationship will encourage students to communicate with them about what is happening with them in school and, accordingly, will encourage them to seek guidance and support with their problems (Belaid & Sarnou, 2019). Not only that but parental support was also perceived as a strong educational resource to teach their children about the pre-marital sexual abstinence. Through a paper-based questionnaire, 250 parents of children aged 12-14 years (grades 7-9) at two urban public pre-secondary schools in Oman supported age-appropriate curriculum to teach sex education that conformed to Islamic requirements. However, they perceived their role in reducing sexual risk behavior and promoting health and well-being to be greater than those programs provided by the school (Al Zaabi et al., 2019).

Summary paragraph:

Targeting bad behavior is a serious challenge that schools in the Arab world face. Physical violence and all forms of bullying were seen among males more than females students. A large sample of adolescents in Kuwait reported being involved in physical fight because they were victims of bullying.

To this end, researchers in Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq, emphasized the importance of schools therapeutic programs to reduce students aggressive behavior particularly at the secondary level. Building stronger relationships between schools and parents and parent-child is an upmost priority to encourage students to communicate the school life and seek guidance and support to solve their problems. Creating sustainable school therapeutic programs is as equally important to reduce secondary students' aggressive behavior.

The majority of studies published in the Arab world examined reasons for negative behaviors and suggested ways to improve them. No studies to date investigated the impact of behavior interventions on students achievement. More research is needed in this area using longitudinal studies and bigger sample in order to infer casual relationships and generalizability of results. Additionally, approaches that address the use of technology for cyber bullying and cyber harassment is highly needed due to this fast spreading phenomenon and its negative effects on students' wellbeing and academic achievement.

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Search Terms

Behavior; anti-social; anti-bullying; juvenile delinquency; truancy; aggression; violent Behavior; anti-social interventions; Rational Emotive Therapy; Counseling; cognitive behavioral therapy; social skills interventions; behavior intervention.

Databases searched

ERIC (EBSCO)
Education Source
Google scholar
ProQuest Central
ProQuest Dissertations