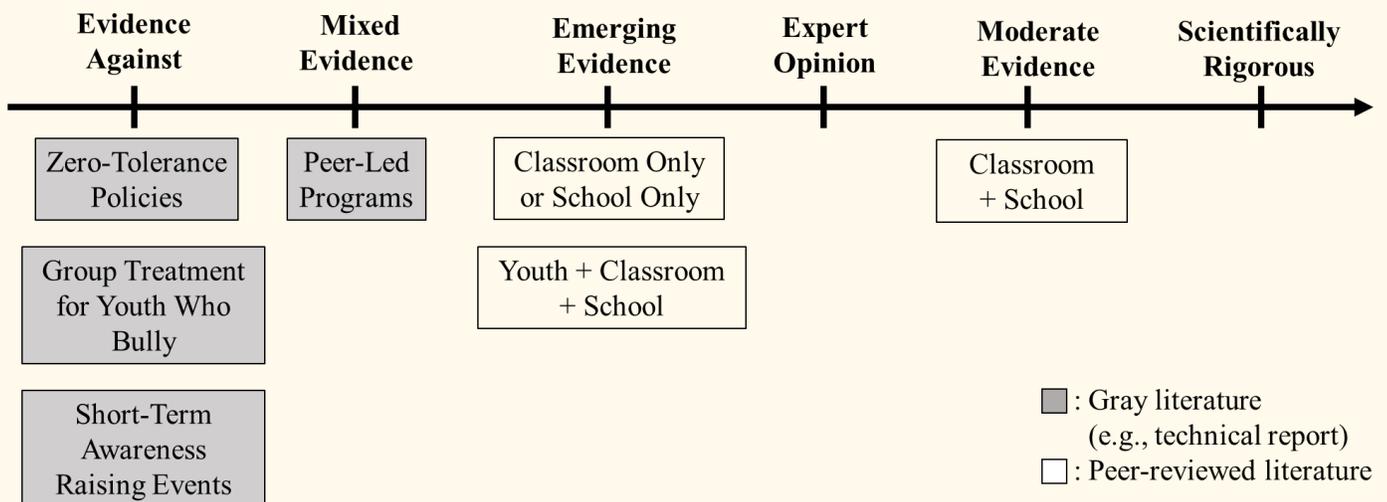


# Strengthen the Evidence Base for Maternal and Child Health Programs

## NPM 9: Bullying

**Bullying** is one of fifteen MCH National Performance Measures (NPMs) for the State Title V Block Grant program. The goal is to reduce the number of adolescents, ages 12–17 years, who are bullied. Bullying is a serious public health issue with consequences for psychological, psychosomatic, and academic functioning for both bullies and victims.<sup>1,2,3</sup> This brief identifies evidence-informed strategies that State Title V programs might consider implementing to address NPM 9.

The evidence review categorized anti-bullying interventions along an evidence continuum from *Evidence Against* (least favorable) to *Scientifically Rigorous* (most favorable). Strategies that are characterized by *Emerging Evidence* or more favorable ratings are considered evidence-informed. Zero-tolerance policies, group treatment for youth who bully, and short-term awareness raising events were assigned to the *Evidence Against* category. *Mixed Evidence* was identified for peer-led programs. *Emerging Evidence* was found for interventions carried out in classrooms or schools and interventions that combined activities for youth at risk for bullying with interventions implemented in classrooms and schools. *Moderate Evidence* was identified for strategies implemented in both classrooms and schools.



This review was conducted as part of Strengthen the Evidence Base for Maternal and Child Health Programs, a Health Resources and Services Administration-funded initiative that aims to support states in their development and implementation of strategies to promote the health and well-being of MCH populations in the United States. The remainder of the brief summarizes the approach to the review. The full review may be found at <http://semch.org/evidence-reviews.html>.

Bullying is defined as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm.<sup>4</sup>” There are four traditional types of bullying (physical, verbal, relational, and damage to property), as well as cyberbullying. Recent estimates indicate that about 20% of grade 9-12 students are bullied in schools and approximately 16% are cyberbullied<sup>5</sup>; about 14% are estimated to bully others frequently.<sup>6</sup>

**METHODS & RESULTS**

Peer-reviewed studies were identified by searching four online databases. Thirty-eight studies that evaluated the effectiveness of interventions to prevent or reduce bullying among secondary school students were included. Two gray literature sources included the report “*Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice*” released by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine,<sup>7</sup> and selected resources identified at [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov).<sup>8</sup> Interventions included those that were targeted, universal, or a combination of targeted and universal. Targeted strategies were tailored to youth at high risk for bullying victimization/perpetration. Universal strategies aimed to reduce risks for all youth. Examples of each type of intervention and its evidence rating are shown below.

Nature of Intervention	Intervention Category	Example(s)	Evidence Rating
Targeted	Youth Only	Individual counseling; peer mentoring	—
Universal	Classroom Only	Curricular activities (class instruction, small group discussion); class rules	Emerging Evidence
	School Only	School rules; media campaign; teacher/staff training	Emerging Evidence
	Classroom + School	Curricular activities + school rules	Moderate Evidence
Targeted + Universal	Youth + Classroom	Individual counseling + curricular activities	—
	Youth + School	Individual counseling + school rules	—
	Youth + Classroom + School	Individual counseling + curricular activities + school rules	Emerging Evidence

— indicates insufficient number of studies to assign evidence rating

Interventions identified from both peer-reviewed and gray literature (e.g., technical report) were placed along an evidence continuum to reflect whether they were: *Evidence Against, Mixed Evidence, Emerging Evidence, Expert Opinion, Moderate Evidence, or Scientifically Rigorous*. Specific criteria for both study type and study results informed the designation of the level of evidence for each intervention. Intervention categories with fewer than four studies were not placed on the continuum.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- Targeted interventions (i.e., those tailored to youth at risk for bullying) alone do not appear to be effective in reducing bullying.
- Universal strategies such as those implemented in classrooms (e.g., classroom instruction or class rules) and/or schools (e.g., school rules or teacher/staff training) appear to be somewhat effective.
- Combining classroom and school level interventions appears to be more effective than implementing either alone.
- Multi-tiered approaches including both targeted and universal strategies may offer added benefits.
- Peer-led programs such as peer mediation yield mixed results.
- Zero-tolerance policies, group treatment for youth who bully, and short-term awareness raising events are not recommended.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

- Future efforts should focus on improving the adoption, implementation fidelity, and sustainability of evidence-based programs.
- Research is needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions targeting vulnerable subgroups of youth, as the likelihood of being bullied varies by race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Evaluations of interventions addressing cyberbullying in the US are needed to understand how to address this issue confronting our nation's youth.

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