

Awareness-Raising Tools Regarding Violence Against Students in Schools: A Literature Review

Catherine Tardif, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1330-6319>, Université de Montréal, Canada
Geneviève Carpentier, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0905-0587>, Université de Montréal, Canada
Normand Roy, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0370-5236>, Université de Montréal, Canada

Résumé : Cette recension des écrits identifie les caractéristiques communes des outils de sensibilisation existants en lien avec la violence envers les élèves en milieu scolaire, et plus spécifiquement concernant la violence éducative ordinaire en milieu scolaire. Quinze documents pertinents ont été analysés. L'analyse indique d'abord une rareté des outils abordant spécifiquement la violence éducative ordinaire. La plupart des outils se concentrent sur des interventions universelles visant des changements culturels ou pour outiller le personnel à reconnaître et à intervenir lorsqu'il est témoin de violence. Malgré des variations dans le contenu et le format, l'efficacité de ces outils est souvent évaluée sans pouvoir distinguer quels éléments y contribuent. Cette étude met en lumière des caractéristiques partagées et propose des pistes précieuses pour le développement d'un outil de sensibilisation visant à prévenir la violence éducative ordinaire à l'école.

Mots-clés : violence éducative ordinaire; recension des écrits; sensibilisation; prévention de la violence, changement de pratique

Abstract: This paper presents a literature review aimed at identifying common features of existing awareness-raising tools related to violence against students, and more specifically ordinary educational violence in schools. Fifteen relevant documents were analyzed, revealing a scarcity of tools addressing ordinary educational violence. Most tools focus on universal intervention, targeting cultural shifts, or equipping staff to recognize and address specific manifestations of violence. Despite variations in content and format, the effectiveness of these tools is often claimed without clearly identifying the factors contributing to their success. Drawing from these insights, this study outlines shared characteristics and offers valuable insights for the development of an awareness-raising tool to prevent ordinary educational violence in schools.

Keywords: awareness-raising; ordinary educational violence; literature review; violence prevention; improving schools

Introduction

School violence typically involves students harming one another or school staff, but it can also include acts of violence by teaching staff towards students (Beaumont et al., 2020; Bérubé & Beaumont, 2022; Longobardi et al., 2018; Montuoro & Mainhard, 2017). While physical and sexual violence against students is rare in North America (Beaumont et al., 2020), abuse (Longobardi et al., 2018), maltreatment (Bérubé & Beaumont, 2022), and coercive practices (Romi et al., 2011) are becoming increasingly common. In Quebec, a large-scale survey found that one in six students reported experiencing shouting, cursing, scornful looks, or deliberate ignoring by school staff (Beaumont et al., 2020). Such practices are often tolerated and normalized within school environments (Twemlow et al., 2006; Verlaan & Besnard, 2014), despite well-documented evidence of their negative impact (Horner & McIntosh, 2016; Montuoro & Lewis, 2018). Throughout the literature, these behaviours are linked to the concept of *ordinary educational violence*, defined as violence committed by an adult in a position of authority towards a minor under the pretext that it is intended to be educational or disciplinary (Gueguen, 2015; Maurel, 2009). Present in both elementary and secondary schools, such practices can cause significant harm including undermining student success and engagement, exacerbating behavioural challenges, and weakening teacher-student relationships (Bernier, 2021; Montuoro & Lewis, 2018).

Despite the attention given to violence against students in the scientific literature (Bérubé & Beaumont, 2022; Longobardi et al., 2018; Montuoro & Mainhard, 2017), and the media (Abdelfadel, 2023; Laroque, 2023; Monzée, 2024), the prevalence of violence reported by students has remained unchanged in recent years (Beaumont et al., 2020). Research suggests that these practices persist for various reasons: some teachers consider them effective (Berger & Girardet, 2016), while others are unaware of alternative approaches (Cheruvath & Tripathi, 2015; Nkuba et al., 2018), or of the harmful effects of violence towards students. Given that these practices are often rooted in deeply held beliefs, addressing ordinary educational violence requires tools that raise awareness and challenge entrenched conceptions. Awareness-raising tools have been proven effective in prompting action by challenging taken-for-granted conceptions (Delbays-Atge & Mang-Joubert, 2017; Gouzien-Desbiens et al., 2021) and could thus be employed to encourage school staff

to critically reflect on and reconsider their practices. However, what specific tools exist to address ordinary educational violence in schools? Are they used and in which context? Can they effectively raise awareness? And if so, what characteristics define their effectiveness? Therefore, this study aims to explore awareness-raising tools about ordinary educational violence at K12 level and seeks to identify their common characteristics. Understanding these features could support their dissemination and serve as inspiration for the development of contextually adapted resources.

Research Framework

School Violence Prevention and Interventions

Interventions aimed at addressing school violence typically operate at three levels: universal, selected, and indicated, each focusing on different forms of prevention, and engaging various school staff including teachers, administrators, counselors, and psychologists (Deklerck, 2009). Universal interventions target the entire student body using a whole-school approach to foster a positive and safe environment through policies that promote inclusivity, respect, and conflict-resolution skills among both staff and students. Selected interventions focus on specific at-risk groups or individuals through tailored programs, for example, students exhibiting aggressive tendencies may receive specialized counseling, and new teachers struggling with classroom management may receive mentoring to prevent escalation. Indicated interventions are designed for those already displaying violent behaviour and involves intensive support strategies to address underlying causes, such as anger management or social skills training. Consequently, the awareness-raising tools identified in this article are analyzed based on their target population and level of intervention. This approach allows for a clearer understanding of how each tool aligns with the specific needs of different groups or school.

Materials and Methods

This review follows Randolph's (2009) five-stage approach: 1) problem formulation, 2) data collection, 3) data evaluation, 4) analysis and interpretation, and 5) public presentation. This method was chosen for its completeness, as it ensures reliability and reproducibility, meeting criteria for rigor, transparency, and reproducibility (Villeneuve-Lapointe & Moreau, 2019).

Stage 1: Problem Formulation

This review will be guided by the following questions: What are the common characteristics of awareness-raising tools that address adult violence against students or other sensitive topics?

Stage 2: Data collection

Given this review's purpose, broad yet selective coverage was essential. While not limited to the fields of education or violence, our search was refined to meet specific criteria ensuring relevance. Included texts had to be 1) peer-reviewed, 2) empirical, 3) describe tool characteristics, 4) present results applicable to educational contexts, 5) address sensitive topics (e.g., violence, gambling), and 6) be in French or English. Keywords related to children or students were combined with terms about elementary, primary, or secondary schools, school environments, violence and maltreatment (e.g., discrimination, abuse, harassment), and school-based violence prevention interventions (e.g., career development, continuing education, professional development).

We first searched English-language databases on EBSCO and PsychINFO, filtering for articles post-2000, yielding 218 documents. After reviewing titles and keywords, 21 were relevant. A similar search using French keywords on ÉRUDIT yielded 80 additional articles, with 10 deemed relevant. The 31 selected documents were then exported to Zotero. After reading summaries, 23 were retained.

Stage 3: Data evaluation

Relevance was assessed by reading the abstracts and then the full document. Data was extracted into an Excel sheet, where the nature and origin of the text, research question, population, context, methodology, and results were categorized. Five columns were dedicated to the tool's characteristics.

A full review of the literature revealed that ten texts did not meet the inclusion criteria. Seven were excluded because they did not provide detailed descriptions of the tools or their characteristics. Three others were excluded for offering only general recommendations on violence awareness, without focusing on a specific awareness-raising tool. Two additional relevant documents were identified and included, resulting in the final corpus to 15 documents. Table 1 presents these documents by author, origin, population, nature, and purpose.

Table 1: List of reviewed documents

Authors	Origin	Population	Nature
1. Baumgarten et al., (2023)	n/a	Elementary and high school teachers and/or students	Systematic review
2. Bolduc & Gauthier (2014)	Canada, Québec	Men committing domestic violence	Empirical
3. Daigle & Gallagher (2009)	Canada, Québec	Elementary schools staff	Empirical
4. Dibbs et al. (2023)		Pre-service middle school mathematics teachers	Empirical
5. Giroux et al. (2012)	Canada, Québec	Young adult gamers (18-25 yo)	Empirical
6. Gushwa et al. (2019)	USA	Elementary teachers	Empirical
7. Jodoin (2021)	Canada, Québec	High school teachers	Empirical
8. Kwan Teau (2015)	Canada, Québec	Adults (18 - 25 yo)	These (master)
9. Massé (2023)	Canada, Québec	Trainee teacher	These (master)
10. Mowder & Orland (2006)	USA	Adults (by modeling) and students	Empirical
11. Naker (2019)	Uganda	Teachers in poor environments of developing countries	Conceptual paper
12. Nkuba et al. (2018)	Tanzania	High school teachers and students	Empirical
13. Sultana et al. (2020)	Bangladesh	Elementary school teachers	Empirical
14. Tilga et al. (2021)	Estonia	Physical education teachers – 6th – 8th grade	Empirical
15. Verlaan et al. (2005)	Canada, Québec	5th and 6th grade elementary students	Empirical

Stage 4: Analysis and Interpretation

The fourth stage, data analysis and interpretation (Randolph, 2009), involved synthesizing and comparing the gathered information to identify both areas of complementarity and divergence. This approach enabled the decontextualization and recontextualization of key elements, facilitating groupings and cross-document comparisons to identify common characteristics of the tools described in the analyzed texts.

Stage 5: Public Presentation of Common Characteristics

Target population and subject. Of the 15 awareness tools identified, most focus on aspects of school violence including aggression, bullying, sexual abuse, indirect aggression, microaggressions, and violence against students, or promoting autonomy-supportive behaviour (see Table 2). Of these, eight target teachers, two target future teachers, and only two target the entire school. Among the eight tools for teachers, three were developed to prevent physical violence against students (The Good School Toolkit, ICC-T, and IRIE Classroom Toolbox), with two also addressing emotional violence and one covering sexual violence. Three additional tools focus on topics outside school violence, namely domestic violence, gaming, and smoking.

Level of intervention and aims. Nine of the identified tools operate at a universal level. Four are universal but specific, designed to equip staff with the skills to quickly recognize specific signs, such as distress, and intervene preventively. Two programs operate at the indicated level.

Table 2: List of the Tools

	Program or tool	Target population	Object	Level of intervention	Aims	Studies using it
1.	Good School Toolkit	Teachers	Teacher-on-student violence (physical, emotional, and sexual)	Universal	To shift school operational culture through a six-step process.	Devries et al. (2015) Naker (2019)
2.	Interactions Competencies with Children for Teachers (ICC-T)	Teachers	Teacher-on-student violence (physical, and emotion)	Universal - specific	To prevent teacher violence against children in poor environments of developing countries.	Nkuba et al. (2018) Ssenyonga et al. (2022)
3.	IRIE Classroom Toolbox	Teachers	Teacher-on-student violence (physical)	Universal	To prevent teacher violence against children, prevent antisocial behaviour among children.	Baker-Henningham et al. (2019)
4.	<i>Programme Intervention-suicide</i>	Teachers	Suicide prevention in elementary school	Universal - specific	To identify children in distress or suicidal behaviour. To prevent the escalation of suicidal ideation and the act of suicide. To intervene in schools after a suicide.	Daigle & Gallagher (2009)
5.	Enough! Online Training Program For K-12 Teachers	Teachers	Child sexual abuse prevention in schools (sexual)	Universal	To dispel some of the misconceptions and fears or biases that could deter individuals from responding to or reporting suspected cases of abuse or misconduct.	Gushwa et al. (2019)
6.	N/A	Elementary teachers	Student-on-student bullying (emotional)	Universal	To encourage teachers to act against bullying at school.	Sultana et al. (2020)
7.	The Adults and Children Together training program (ACT)	Teachers and students	Student-on-student aggressive behaviors (physical)	Universal - specific	To help adults teach children to develop non-aggressive ways of problem solving, and to model positive ways for young children to deal with anger and resolve conflicts.	Mowder & Orland (2006)
8.	Web-based Autonomy-Supportive Intervention on Physical Education Teacher (WB-ASIP)	Physical Education teachers	Teacher-on-student autonomy-supportive behaviour (emotional)	Universal	To promote changes in PE teachers' self-reported autonomy-supportive behaviour, psychological needs satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and teaching efficacy for students' engagement.	Tilga et al. (2021)

9.	<i>Parler de Violence Sexuelle au Primaire (PVSP)</i>	Pre-service teachers	Adult-on-student sexual violence	Universal - specific	To recognize the importance of addressing the issue of sexual violence in the classroom. To plan learning situations related to the issue of sexual violence. To respond appropriately to children who are suspected or victims of sexual violence.	Massé (2023)
10.	Bafa Bafa	Pre-service teachers	Teachers-on- students microaggression (emotional)	Universal	To help pre-service teachers understand how students who are underrepresented in the mathematics classroom experience a dominant culture.	Dibbs et al. (2023)
11.	Empreinte	School staff	Sexual violence	Universal	To train school staff to recognize possible signs of sexual abuse and refer young people to resources for help and support.	Jodoin (2021)
12.	N/A	School staff and parents	Indirect aggression (emotional)	Universal	To raise awareness of indirect aggression among students, school staff and parents.	Verlaan et al. (2005)
13.	<i>Six million de vie</i>	Young adults	Tabagism	Indicated	To study the factors that promote the development of healthy behavior following a serious gaming experience.	Kwan Teau (2015)
14.	<i>Les dessous du jeu</i>	Young adult gamers	Gambling	Universal	To raise awareness among young adults about gambling.	Giroux et al. (2012)
15.	<i>Groupe d'information et de sensibilisation à la violence conjugale et familiale</i>	Men committing domestic violence	Domestic violence	Indicated	To encourage men who are resistant to intervention and who do not recognize the violent nature of some of their behaviors to take ownership of their request for help and act.	Bolduc & Gauthier (2014)

Content

The content of the tools is categorized in Table 3 into three areas. Overall, while some topics are covered more extensively than others, the range of content reflects a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing this sensitive issue in different contexts. The analysis reveals significant interest in exploring the contextual factors surrounding violence.

Table 3: Content of the Tools

Aim	Content	Author
Understanding, and defining	Definition	Bolduc & Gauthier (2014), Giroux et al. (2012), Gushwa et al. (2019), Jodoin (2021), Massé (2023), Sultana et al. (2020), Verlaan et al. (2005)
	Myth, prevalence, prejudice, cause and/or consequences	Bolduc & Gauthier (2014), Giroux et al. (2012), Gushwa et al. (2019), Jodoin (2021), Sultana et al. (2020), Massé (2023)
	Example / counterexample or case presentation	Giroux et al. (2012), Gushwa et al. (2019)
	Experience – cognitive conflict	Dibbs et al. (2023)
Offering Alternatives, and Exploring Solutions	Positive and effective discipline techniques	Baker-Henningham et al. (2019), Devries et al. (2015), Mowder & Orland (2006), Naker (2019), Nkuba et al. (2018), Ssenyonga et al. (2022)
	How to intervene	Jodoin (2021), Gushwa et al. (2019), Massé (2023), Verlaan et al. (2005)
	Practical exercises	Devries et al. (2015), Naker (2019)
	Bullying in the classroom, constructive communication skills, peer support strategies	Sultana et al. (2020)
	Available material and content, planning learning situations	Massé (2023)
	Anger management	Mowder & Orland (2006)
	Strategies for broaching the subject of gambling with a loved one, and ways of protecting oneself while helping a loved one	Giroux et al. (2012)
	Social Problem Solving	Mowder & Orland (2006)
Engaging and mobilizing	How to detect the problem	Giroux et al. (2012), Gushwa et al. (2019), Sultana et al. (2020), Massé (2023)
	Reflexive discussion	Dibbs et al. (2023), Tilga et al. (2021)
	Establishing behavior-change goals	Devries et al. (2015), Naker (2019)
	Supporting motivation to change and to ask for help (Exploring the process of change, bringing out strengths to increase their sense of self-efficacy)	Bolduc & Gauthier (2014)
	Self-assessment	Giroux et al. (2012)

Form

A significant number of tools ($n = 12$) utilize modular or block-based training formats, likely because most tools are implemented as comprehensive programs. Four tools utilize shorter intervention formats, such as websites or interactives activities. Six tools are designed with formats that specifically support implementation strategies by providing supplemental materials. Daigle and Gallagher (2009) also produced three guides: an intervention guide, a guide for elementary school principals, and a third guide for school staff. Table 4 presents a synthesis of these formats.

Table 4. Formats of the tools

Form	Authors
Website or activities	Dibbs et al. (2023), Giroux et al. (2012), Gushwa et al. (2019), Kwan Teau (2015)
Training in steps or multiple blocs	Bolduc & Gauthier (2014), Daigle & Gallagher (2009), Devries et al. (2015), Jodoin (2021), Massé (2023), Mowder

	& Orland (2006), Naker (2019), Nkuba et al. (2018), Ssenyonga et al. (2022), Tilga et al. (2021), Sultana et al. (2020), Verlaan et al. (2005)
Creation of various implementation committees and follow-up meetings	Daigle & Gallagher (2009)
Supplemental Material (books, posters, facilitations guides, stories)	Baker-Henningham et al. (2019), Daigle & Gallagher (2009); Devries et al. (2015), Naker (2019), Verlaan et al. (2005)

Discussion

The aim of this literature review was to identify the common features of existing awareness-raising tools. Several common features have been identified suggesting a shared emphasis on establishing clear definitions within the discourse and offering practical strategies to enhance awareness and promote change. These findings align with the recommendations of Collette et al. (2021) and Bryk et al. (2015), who emphasize the importance of presenting factual data to foster awareness and create a shared understanding of the issue. Content designed to engage and mobilize individuals remains underused, indicating a gap in current tools. Actively involving individuals as key agents of change is essential (Lauzier et al., 2018). Most tools leverage interactive methods—such as training, face-to-face or online activities, and complementary materials which Gouzien-Desbiens et al. (2021) found more effective than purely informational approaches. Collette et al. (2021) also advocate prioritizing direct-contact methods to enhance engagement and support behavioural change. In this context, an ecosystemic approach, as proposed by O'Moore and Minton (2004) in the field of bullying prevention, could be particularly relevant. By accounting for the influence of social and environmental dynamics on behaviour, this approach emphasizes the roles of both adults and students in fostering an inclusive school climate. Given that ordinary educational violence is often tolerated and embedded in school dynamics, mobilizing the entire school community may be essential to driving meaningful change. However, only two of the tools identified in this review adopt a whole-school approach (Jodoin, 2021; Verlaan et al., 2005).

Limitations and Recommendations

In discussing practice change, it's crucial to consider various aspects (Larose et al., 2023). In addition to examining the characteristics of awareness-raising tools, attention should also be given to exploring the theoretical approach that inform their design. While most of the articles identified in this paper demonstrate the effectiveness of the tool, they failed to identify the specific characteristics that contribute to their success. As a result, it remains difficult to determine the strengths and limitations of these tools, or to make informed recommendations about the potential content of a targeted tool addressing ordinary educational violence. For practitioners, this literature review highlights the existence of tools that, while not specifically designed for it, could be used to address ordinary educational violence. The key characteristics described in this article, such as audience, objectives, content, and format which can help select programs that best align with a school's specific needs or context.

Conclusion

This review reveals a significant gap in the availability of tools designed to raise awareness among school staff about ordinary educational violence. While some tools address related issues, the continued prevalence of such practices highlights the need for a tool that specifically targets this problem. Although common features were identified across the reviewed tools, limited information is available regarding their strengths and limitations. Many studies emphasize the importance of factors such as implementation, context, and tool characteristics in evaluating effectiveness; however, these aspects were often overlooked. A more in-depth examination of these factors is necessary to develop awareness strategies that effectively promote positive behaviour support practices in schools.

Despite these limitations, the common features provide valuable insights for developing future tools. Addressing these gaps with context-specific approaches can better support the prevention of ordinary educational violence and contribute to the creation of safer school environments for students.

Acknowledgements

This project received financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Université de Montréal.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine Tardif est chargée de cours à l'Université de Montréal et à l'Université du Québec à Montréal et étudiante au doctorat à l'Université de Montréal sous la direction de Geneviève Carpentier et de Normand Roy. Elle est membre du Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la formation et la profession enseignante (CRIFPE), de l'Équipe RENARD et coresponsable d'axe pour l'Observatoire sur la santé mentale en enseignement supérieur (OSMEES).

Geneviève Carpentier est professeure agrégée au département de psychopédagogie et d'andragogie de l'Université de Montréal et chercheuse au Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la formation et la profession enseignante (CRIFPE) ainsi qu'au Groupe pour l'évaluation des pratiques professionnelles (gEvaPP). Elle est également rédactrice de la revue professionnelle *Vivre le primaire*.

Normand Roy est professeur au département de psychopédagogie et d'andragogie à l'Université de Montréal, directeur du Groupe de recherche interétablissement en intégration pédagogique des technologies (GRIPTIC, financé par le FRQSC), codirecteur du LAVIA (CRSH Partenariat) et chercheur régulier au Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la formation et la profession enseignante (CRIFPE). Il est également membre de l'OBVIA, observatoire qui s'intéresse aux enjeux sociétaux de l'intelligence artificielle.