

Bystander Intervention Literature Review: Methodology

In early 2026, CNA conducted a rapid literature review to synthesize the evidence on bystander inventions in the following areas:

- Domestic terrorism/targeted violence
- Bullying
- Suicide

Bystander intervention refers to the actions taken by individuals who witness a potentially harmful situation (e.g., bullying, violence) to prevent or interrupt the potential harm. Bystander intervention models promote the recognition of problematic behaviors or actions, the assessment of the current risk, and the adoption of safe intervention strategies. Currently, there is limited scholarly research on the effectiveness of bystander interventions in preventing or disrupting domestic terrorism and targeted violence. For this review, we analyzed this limited literature. In addition, we drew on lessons learned from increasing bystander intervention in the prevention of suicide* and bullying** to identify promising practices for increasing bystander intervention in the prevention of domestic terrorism and targeted violence.

Inclusion Criteria

Consistent with best practices, we developed search strategies and inclusion criteria before beginning the literature review.¹ By doing so, we ensured that the inclusion and exclusion criteria remained free from author bias.² We used the following criteria to determine inclusion eligibility:

1. We included peer-reviewed studies published in academic journals and excluded books, book chapters, unpublished theses and dissertations, and grey literature.
2. We excluded meta-analyses, systematic literature reviews, and commentaries.
3. We included quantitative, qualitative, and descriptive methodologies.
4. We included studies that tested or evaluated a strategy for increasing bystander intervention.
5. We included studies published after 2010.
6. We included studies in which outcomes were clearly operationalized and addressed the effectiveness of a strategy for increasing bystander intervention.

* Clinicians have used the pathway to suicide as a model for developing a pathway to violence, which is now being widely adopted.

** Schools are running antibullying campaigns with the goal of reducing violence.

7. We included studies that reported the timing of the study and data collection, the type of data used, the data collection methods, and clearly defined methodology.
8. We included studies written in or translated into English.
9. We included studies that used data from the United States or Europe.

To be included in the final review, reports, articles, and studies had to meet all the eligibility criteria.

Searching Strategies

Before conducting this search, we identified topics and phrases that are commonly associated with our key areas of interest, and we adapted them for searches within Google Scholar. To compile our keywords, we relied on internal expertise related to the bystander intervention areas of interest (see Table 1).

We conducted an initial search for relevant articles using Google Scholar. For all searches, we downloaded each result until we reached a full page (i.e., 10 consecutive results) of obviously irrelevant articles.

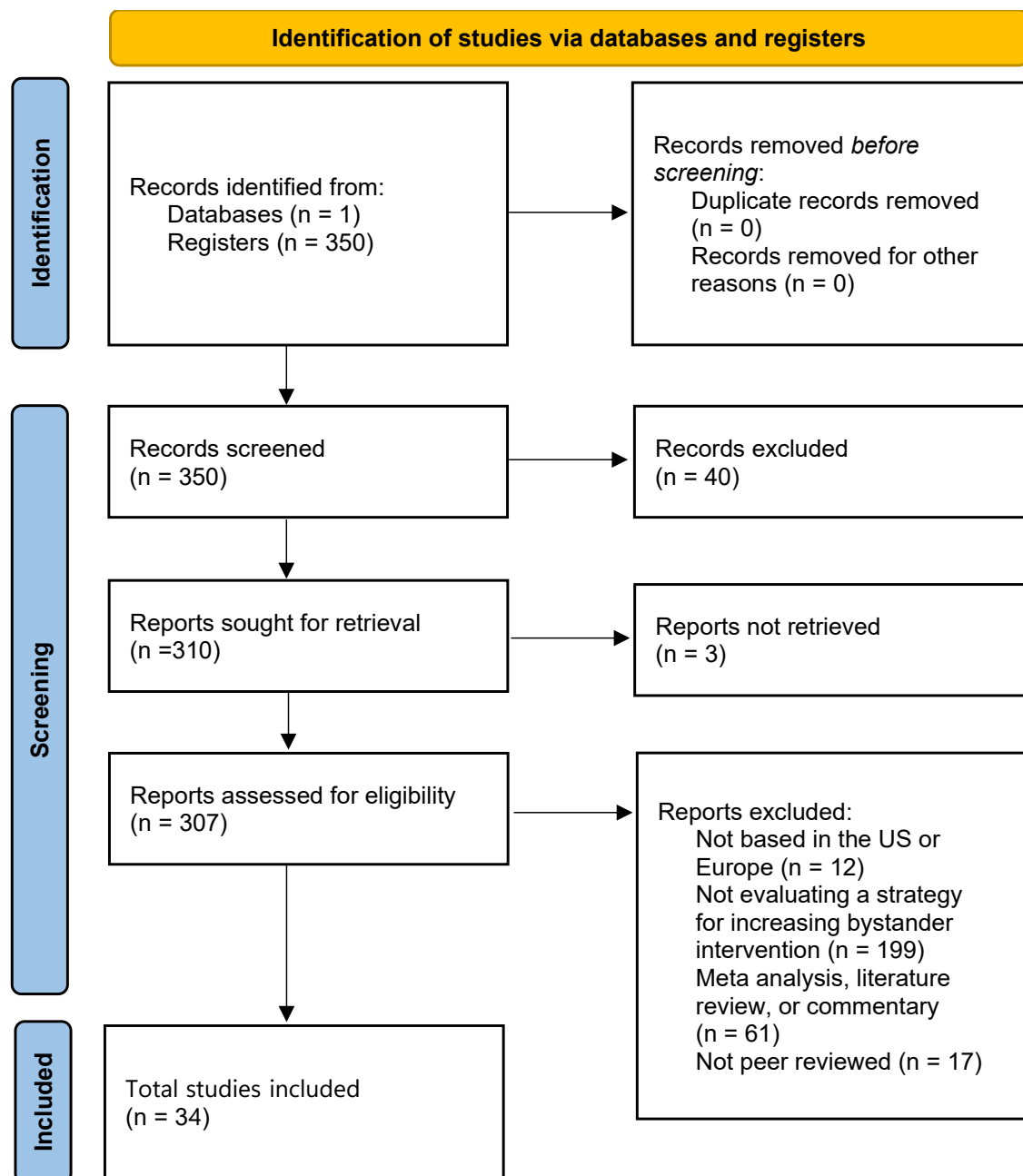
Table 1. Keywords for literature review

	Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4
Key Concept	Bystander Intervention	Domestic Terrorism/Targeted Violence	Suicide Prevention	Bullying
Free Text Term/Natural Language Terms	"Bystander intervention" "Bystander behavior" "Bystander effect" "Bystander response" "Third party intervention" "Third party reporting" "Bystander reporting" "Community reporting" "Violence prevention" "Early intervention" "Peer intervention" "Peer bystanders" "Helpers" "Anti-Bullying"	"Radicalization" "Radicalisation" "Domestic terrorism" "Domestic extremism" "Violent extremism" "Extremist violence" "Terrorist attack" "Targeted violence" "School shooting" "School shooter" "Mass shooting" "Mass shooter" "Active shooter" "Workplace shooting" "Premeditated hate crimes" "Hate crimes" "Mass violence" "Mass attack" "Ideologically motivated violence" "Politically motivated violence"	"Suicide" "Suicide attempt" "Suicide prevention" "Suicide awareness" "Suicide ideation" "Crisis intervention" "Crisis hotline" "Suicide hotline" "Self injury" "Self-harm" "Self-harm intervention" "Suicide related behaviors" "Suicide related crisis"	"Bullying" "Cyberbullying" "Harassment" "Peer aggression" "School violence" "Online harassment" "Digital harassment" "Internet harassment" "Internet bullying" "Social media aggression" "Student violence" "Peer-on-peer abuse" "Peer harassment" "Peer victimization"

Source: CNA.

Note: See the appendix for our list of Boolean search terms.

Next, we conducted a cursory review of all studies, summaries, and abstracts to determine whether results could be immediately excluded because they obviously did not meet our inclusion criteria. We started with 350 results from our initial data pull, and after this initial screening, 18 remained (see Figure 1).[†]



Source: Adapted from Matthew Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *International Journal of Surgery* 88 (2021), p. 5, doi: 10.1016/j.ijssu.2021.105906.

[†] We were unable to locate three full articles from our initial data pull.

Figure 1. Excluded results

We then coded the remaining 18 publications (Table 2) and determined that, upon closer reading, two did not meet our inclusion criteria. Upon compiling the remaining 16 publications, we conducted a second search in Google Scholar for the names of specific bystander intervention programs that were being evaluated to ensure that our searches captured as much literature as possible. After this search, we analyzed 34 publications in total.

Table 2. Full coding criteria

Study's full citation
First author's last name, first name
Study title
Publication year
Coder's name
Type of behavior being studied/prevented • Domestic extremism/targeted violence • Suicide • Bullying
Type of study • Qualitative • Quantitative • Case studies • Mixed methods
Population • Adults • Juveniles
Setting • High school • College • Workplace • Community • Online • Other
If other, please provide
Type of bystander intervention • Direct intervention • Distraction • Seeking help • Reporting
Measure of outcomes included • Yes • No

Data collection methods

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Administrative data
- Others

Key results

Limitations/potential bias

- Selection bias
- Sampling bias
- Generalizability
- Measurement error
- Missing data
- Methodological limitations
- Funding bias
- Other

Explanation

Source: CNA.



Appendix: Search Terms

("bystander" OR "third party" OR "community" OR "peer" OR "helper" OR "anti-bullying") AND ("intervention" OR "behavior" OR "effect" OR "response" OR "report*" OR "prevent*")

AND

("radicaliz*" OR "radicalis*" OR "domestic terror*" OR "domestic extremism" OR "violent extremism" OR "extremist violence" OR "terror* attack" OR "targeted violence" OR "school shoot*" OR "mass shoot*" OR "active shoot*" OR "workplace shoot*" OR "premeditated hate crimes" OR "hate crimes" OR "mass violence" OR "mass attack" OR "ideologically motivated violence" OR "politically motivated violence" OR "political violence")

("suicide" OR "suicide attempt" OR "suicide prevention" OR "suicide awareness" OR "suicide ideat*" OR "crisis intervention" OR "crisis hotline" OR "suicide hotline" OR "self-injury" OR "self injury" OR "self harm" OR "self-harm" OR "self harm intervention" OR "self harm intervention" OR "suicide related behavior" OR suicide related crisis")

("bully*" OR "cyberbully*" OR "harass*" OR "peer aggression" OR "school violence" OR "online harassment" OR "digital harassment" OR "internet harassment" OR "internet bully*" OR "social media aggression" OR "student violence" OR "peer-on-peer abuse" OR "peer harassment" OR "peer victimization")

References

1. Toby J. Lasserson, James Thomas, and Julian Higgins, "Chapter 1: Starting a Review," in *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* (version 6.0), ed. Julian Higgins et al. (Cochrane, 2019), <https://www.cochrane.org/authors/handbooks-and-manuals/handbook/archive/v6.0>.
2. Joanne E. McKenzie et al., "Chapter 3: Defining the Criteria for Including Studies and How They Will Be Grouped for the Synthesis," in *Cochran Handbook for Systematic Review of Interventions* (version 6.0), ed. Julian Higgins et al. (Cochrane, 2019), <https://www.cochrane.org/authors/handbooks-and-manuals/handbook/archive/v6.0>.

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For our literature review, please see our report *Bystander Intervention Training Across Contexts: Lessons for Preventing Targeted Violence*.

To learn more about the DVERT Center, go to dvert.org or contact our team at dvert@cna.org.

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