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AN EVALUATION OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL'S BULLY PREVENTION PROGRAM

A thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist

in

School Psychology

by
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of a positive behavior support intervention program on the behavior of students in a middle school in a rural county in southern West Virginia. The study used a Pretest-Intervention-Posttest design using a single group of subjects across the span of four academic school years. The researcher measured the frequency of Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's) pre and post intervention to determine if the intervention program was effective in improving bullying behavior. Data were analyzed using the Chi Square statistic. Results indicated an increase in total ODR's post-intervention.

Chapter 1

Review of the Literature

Bullying is not a new concern but one that has been prevalent in school systems for decades. It continues to be one of the most common forms of aggression and victimization experienced by school-aged children (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2008). However, as the prevalence of bullying increases, schools are becoming more concerned with maintaining a school environment where students can feel safe. Students' perception of their school environment influences their overall success in school (O'Brennan et al., 2008). This is especially true for victims and bully/victims who tend to feel "unsafe" and "disconnected" from their school and their peers (O'Brennan et al., 2008). Bullying creates environments that are perceived as threatening and intimidating to children creating a climate of fear among students, thus setting an environment for violent acts to occur in schools (Garrity, Jens, & Stoker, 2002; Graham, 2011; Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011; Office of Civil Rights, 2010). In recent years, schools have become more concerned about improving school safety with a rapidly increasing number of intervention programs designed to reduce bullying (Ross, Horner & Stiller, 2008). To ensure the safety of all children, schools have an ethical and legal obligation to protect students from the harsh effects of bullying (Office of Civil Rights, 2010). In fact, 45 states have laws on bullying (Children's Safety Network, 2011). Some acts of bullying can constitute civil rights violations that include discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and on the basis of disability (Office of Civil Rights, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education has proclaimed that school administrators and staff must work together to ensure that students feel that their schools are safe and by doing so will help deter the development of potential mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Schools must

take steps to ensure the safety and rights of all children and must make reasonable efforts to prevent bullying from occurring. The following is a review of the literature which addresses the social construct of bullying, the negative effect bullying has on student mental health and learning, and different approaches used to reduce bullying.

Bullying: An Overview

Bullying can generally be defined as “repeated acts of force or coercion that negatively affects others” (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; O’Brennan et al., 2008; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Bullying involves an imbalance of social, physical, and/or emotional power as well as willful acts of harm against another person (Flaspohler et al., 2009; Nansel et al., 2001; O’Brennan et al., 2008). Research shows mixed results indicating the prevalence of bullying. Some research indicate that as many as 70% and 80% of school-aged children have been involved in bullying while others indicate as few as 20% to 30% (Garrity et al., 2002; Graham, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Trends in bullying tend to increase in late elementary school, peak during middle school, and decline in high school (Graham, 2011; Guerra et al., 2011; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1997; O’Brennan et al., 2008). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) conducted a study on bullying rates between students in 138 public middle and high schools and found that a greater percentage of middle school students (nearly 30%) than high school students (15%) were victims of bullying.

Bullying can be targeted toward children based on their sex, color, race, gender, and sexual orientation. A student who experiences bullying will be characterized as a bully, a victim, or a bully/victim. Bullies act as perpetrators while victims act as targets. Bully/victims are students who bully others and are also bullied themselves (Flaspohler et al., 2009; Graham, 2011). Some

research suggests that the majority of bullies are males, and the majority of victims are females while some suggest no significant difference. Some research suggests that males both bullied others and were bullied significantly more than their female counterparts (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009; Nansel et al., 2001; O'Brennan et al., 2008).

There are typically four types of bullying, and they include the following: Verbal, Physical, Relational/Social, and Electronic. Verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying (Graham, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001). This form of bullying can include making discriminatory jokes or remarks, teasing, using sexually inappropriate or suggestive language, and verbal threats. Verbal bullying is more prevalent among females than males, although both males and females experience verbal bullying, (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Graham, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Verbal bullying also accounts for the vast majority of bullying that occurs in schools as students engage in "spreading rumors" and "ostracizing" other students (Goodwin, 2011). Physical bullying may include hitting, kicking, and punching or any other kind of physical aggression. Physical bullying is more common among males (Nansel et al., 2001). According to Goodwin (2011), less than 30% of bullying incidents are physical. Relational/Social bullying usually entails being the center of cruel and untrue rumors and social isolation. Electronic bullying, also known as cyber-bullying, is a newer form of bullying that occurs through various forms of technology such as text messaging, cell phones, internet based social media and/or networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace), electronic mail, and other websites (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2011). Cyber-bullying is becoming more prevalent as many children engage in bullying via text messaging and through social networking sites making it possible for bullying to occur outside the school environment (Smith et al., 2006).

The Effects of Bullying on Learning and Mental Health

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2011), bullying is negatively associated with increases in suicide risk and depression and is strongly linked to victims' problems with anger, frustration, and violent behavior. Bullying also can have negative effects on a student's mental, physical, and social adjustment (Graham, 2011; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2011). Students who experience bullying encounter feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and isolation. Students who are bullies, victims, or bully/victims tend to have poor relationships with their peers and tend to lack appropriate social skills (O'Brennan et al., 2008). Research suggests that bullies are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior whereas victims tend to experience high levels of internalizing symptoms that put them at a higher risk for depression and anxiety and bully/victims tend to experience a combination of both (O'Brennan et al., 2008). Research indicates that students involved in bullying tend to be at a higher risk for drug abuse, delinquency, suicide, truancy, mental health problems, and below grade level academic achievement (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Flaspohler et al., 2009; Goodwin, 2011; Nansel et al., 2001).

The Punitive Approach

Morrissey, Bohanon, and Fenning (2010) indicate that traditional reactive and/or punitive approaches to discipline have proven to be ineffective in decreasing bullying behavior. In fact, research proves that an overreliance of punitive disciplinary actions and zero tolerance policies are not only ineffective in decreasing problem behavior but can lead to repeated offenses (Graham, 2011; Morrissey et al., 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Reactive discipline approaches usually result in removal of a student from school (e.g., suspension or

expulsion). Sherer and Nickerson (2010) surveyed over 200 practicing school psychologists regarding their schools' anti-bullying programs. The results indicate that roughly 96% of respondents reported that their school used disciplinary approaches that included suspension and expulsion in response to bullying (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). The respondents also indicated that reactive disciplinary practices were used most frequently in response to bullying despite being perceived as one of the most ineffective strategies (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010).

The Proactive Approach

Research suggests that school administrators teach proactive and positive social skills that reinforce positive, respectful behavior (Olweus, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Morrissey et al. (2010) suggest that teaching and acknowledging appropriate behaviors on a prevention-oriented basis, rather than reacting through suspension or expulsion, may be the first step in making schools safer and helping students be successful. Research suggests that schools who implement evidence-based interventions that aim to improve the school environment and provide additional supports to targeted students have been very effective in reducing bullying (Graham, 2011; Ross & Horner, 2009; Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2011). Bullying prevention programs, when implemented accurately and consistently, have been proven to reduce bullying and lead to more positive social relationships among students (Flaspohler et al., 2009). Goodwin (2011) suggests that programs that enlist the support of the entire school community are more effective. Research indicates that effective bullying interventions are based on universal prevention that reinforces proactive factors and positive discipline with clear behavioral expectations and consequences (Goodwin, 2011; Olweus, 1997; Ross & Horner, 2009; Swearer et al., 2009). Research indicates that

prevention programs should include extensive training for all school staff on appropriate implementation and encourage positive discipline practices, increased adult supervision in all areas of the school, school-wide bullying prevention activities, and teaching of specific skills and values within the classroom (Goodwin, 2011; Olweus, 1997; Ross & Horner, 2009; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010; Swearer et al., 2009). Schools should also regularly assess and monitor the effectiveness of the program in reducing bullying (Ross & Horner, 2009; Swearer et al., 2009).

Using positive behavior support to improve school wide behavior. Positive Behavior Support is gaining recognition for its success as a program that addresses school-wide behavioral problems. School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is a “process through which schools improve services for all students by creating systems wherein interventions and management decisions are informed by local data and guided by intervention research,” (Ervin, Schaughency, Matthews, Goodman, & McGlinchey, 2007, p. 1). Morrissey et al. (2010) indicate in their research review that many elementary and middle schools have found PBS to be effective in improving overall problem behavior. Swearer et al., (2009) and Ross & Horner (2009) suggests developing school-wide prevention activities, such as Positive Behavior Support (PBS), to help students develop appropriate social skills, eliminate bullying behaviors, and replace bullying behaviors with positive, prosocial behavior. Bullying prevention practices train school staff in developing and implementing positive behavioral interventions that prevent bullying, reduce bystander involvement, and promote students’ social-emotional development using discipline-related incidents as potential learning opportunities (Ross & Horner, 2009; Swearer et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education 2000). SW-PBS involves changing the system, changing the school environment, and teaching new skills to replace problem behavior

(Sugai & Horner, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The use of PBS decreases the need for more punitive and reactive interventions and focuses more on universal change.

The PBS prevention model is a system wide proactive approach to discipline that involves teachers, students, administrators, and parents who are committed to addressing and examining the specific behavior problems in the school (Ervin et al., 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2006). PBS involves the application of behavior analysis to real-world settings in which children struggle to maintain appropriate behavior and studies have shown that the implementation of PBS has improved social outcomes in schools (Ross & Horner, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2006). The PBS system includes:

- 1.) Committing to addressing the behavior in the school; 2.) Forming a representative problem solving team; 3.) Examining behaviors at a school-wide level using data such as office discipline referrals and surveys; 4.) Choosing three to five behavioral expectations and generating specific examples of these for locations throughout the school; 5.) Providing systematic direct teaching of expected behaviors to all staff and students and then acknowledging (rewarding in some way) all those who meet the expectations; 6.) Clarifying consistent procedures for responding to problem behaviors; and 7.) Systemically using data to monitor progress and adjust interventions as needed (Morrissey et al., 2009, pp. 28).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2000), research has shown that PBS is effective in promoting positive behavior in students and schools and helping to make schools safer. Research indicates that schools who implement PBS also report increased academically engaged time and improved academic performance reporting reductions in office discipline

referrals of 20-60% (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Research also indicates that schools using School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) produce more effective and adequate behavior plans than schools who do not utilize SWPBS (Medley, Little & Akin-Little, 2007; Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Schools using SWPBS were able to clearly and accurately identify the causes of problem behavior in order to develop more appropriate proactive strategies to reduce problem behavior.

Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support

Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS) is based on a three-tiered model. BP-PBS was designed to fit within the framework of school wide PBS (Ross & Horner, 2009). BP-PBS is designed to “(a) define and teach the concept of being respectful to all students, (b) to teach all students a three-step response (stop, walk, talk) that minimizes potential social reinforcement when they encounter disrespectful behavior, (c) to review the three-step prior to entering activities likely to include problematic behavior, (d) to teach an appropriate response when the three-step response is used, and (e) to train staff on a universal strategy for responding when students report incidents of problem behavior”(Ross & Horner, 2009, p.749). BP-PBS gives students tools that they can use to remove the social rewards maintaining inappropriate behavior, thereby decreasing incidents of bullying behavior, but also increases appropriate recipient and bystander responses to bullying behavior (Ross et al., 2008). Research on BP-PBS found that the use of BP-PBS was functionally related to reduction in the number of incidents, variability, and trend of problem behavior among elementary grade students (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008). The study also indicated that faculty rated the BP-PBS as effective and efficient in reducing aggression.

BP-PBS is divided into six lessons that are taught within the classroom. The first lesson reviews the “stop, walk, and talk” response and provides opportunities for students to practice the response. The second lesson instructs students how to respond when they are approached with the “stop, walk, and talk” response with opportunities to practice in small groups. The remaining four lessons are provided over the course of two to three weeks. The last four lessons aim to review the principles of the “stop, walk, and talk” response and instruct students on how to use the response effectively in relation to gossip, inappropriate remarks, and cyber-bullying through group practice and role play.

Research estimates that approximately 80% to 90% of students generally respond to the Tier 1 interventions, or universal interventions, offered through teaching and acknowledgment of proactive behaviors (Gresham, 2004). Tier 1 focuses on creating positive, prosocial climates throughout schools: the use of instructional principles to teach expected behavior, the use of social recognition and acknowledgement of appropriate behavior, a concise and predictable continuum of consequences for problem behavior, and the collection and use of data for decision making purposes (Ross & Horner, 2009; Ross et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Typically, about 10% to 15% of students will require more focused supports (Tier 2) (Gresham, 2004; Morrissey et al., 2010; Ross & Horner, 2009). Tier 2 includes all of the components provided in Tier 1 with additional support given to students where Tier 1 supports were not enough (students who are “at-risk”) (Horner et al., 2008). Additional interventions may be given in small groups of students with more reinforcement and focus on individual behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

The remaining 1% to 5% of students require more intensive and individualized interventions provided in Tier 3 (Gresham, 2004). Students who need Tier 3 are students who have not responded to supports provided in both the primary and secondary level of intervention. In other words, students in Tier 3 are students who failed to respond to BP-PBS. This intervention would include a comprehensive analysis of the function of the student's behavior(s). At the tertiary level, trained professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, and behavioral interventionists develop individualized and comprehensive intervention plans to improve problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Why the need to be evidenced based?

Research suggests that school systems that base decisions on research have more effective and successful interventions compared to schools that do not (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Many schools base their decisions on factors such as cost, appeal, and ease of implementation when deciding on a program (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires schools to adopt programs that are based on "scientific research" that involves the "application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge" (Gutkin & Reynolds, 2009; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Schools should choose programs that are evidence based that are backed with extensive research showing positive outcomes. Prevention programs that are "evidenced based" are backed by extensive research on replicated studies that have shown that the program is effective. The program must be researched, evaluated, and proven effective through extensive research on outcome studies of the program's implementation (Gutkin & Reynolds, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2006). While BP-PBS uses principles that are supported by research on PBS, it is not an evidenced based prevention program that is evaluated

by extensive research on the effectiveness of the program. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) suggests that schools should use evidenced based programs that have shown promising results supported by extensive research if they want to improve student outcomes and improve the overall environment of their schools.

Purpose of Present Study

In the 2010-2011 academic year, a rural middle school in West Virginia decided to implement BP-PBS to reduce the incidence rates and frequency of bullying. As mentioned previously, BP-PBS is not an evidenced based program, although, the principles for which it was developed is based on research. There is no research to support that BP-PBS is evidenced based. The purpose of this study is to determine whether BP-PBS is effective in improving student bullying behavior in a single rural middle school. Total Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's), before and after program implementation, were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in improving student bullying behavior. Research suggests that ODR's typically have strong predictive validity in examining student behavior (Ervin et al., 2007). The researcher posed the following question: Is there a significant difference in the total number of Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's) after the implementation of BP-PBS intervention compared to the total number of ODR's before the implementation of BP-PBS?

Chapter 2

Method

Population Description

The middle school used for the purposes of this study is located in a rural community in southern West Virginia. The majority of the student population (95.6%) is predominately White with over 61% of the student population coming from a Low Socioeconomic Status and receiving a free and/or reduced lunch. There were approximately 467 students from fifth grade to eighth grade enrolled during the 2008-2009 academic year. There were approximately 444 students during the 2009-2010 academic year, 478 students during the 2010-2011 academic year, and 469 students during the 2011-2012 academic year. (See Table 1 for population demographics). There were approximately 911 students in the pre-intervention group and 947 students in the post-intervention group.

Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental research design that used a single group of subjects using a Pretest-Intervention-Posttest design. Total Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's) were examined two years pre-intervention (2008-2010) and two years post-intervention (2010-2012). Data was examined using the Chi Square test of independence to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention data.

The school initiated staff training at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year for implementation of BP-PBS. Training included the following components: the need for supervision in all areas of the school to ensure that bullying incidents do not occur, acknowledging when appropriate behavior occurs and observing proper implementation of the

components of the curriculum being utilized by the students, rewarding students who demonstrated appropriate and positive behavior by using the curriculum components, and checking in on students who are frequently bullied periodically throughout the day and providing re-teaching when necessary. Teachers began teaching lessons and reviewing rules from the BP-PBS curriculum at the beginning of the year. Lessons were taught 1 to 2 times per week and were expected to be demonstrated in and outside the classroom. Lessons were aimed toward establishing positive and appropriate ways to respond to a bully using the three step response that includes “stop”, “walk”, and “talk”. Students were provided verbal praise regularly when demonstrating the use of key components of the BP-PBS. Students were rewarded at the end of each three week period based on student feedback from surveys.

Data Collection

Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's) for bullying incidents were calculated from four consecutive school years. ODR's from the first two years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010) were collected to measure pre-intervention frequencies while ODR's from the last two years (2010-2011 and 2011-2012) were measured for post-intervention frequencies. ODR data comprised of both male and female students grades five through eight. ODR's were retrieved from the West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS). WVEIS is a database system that provides school administrators, teachers, and other school officials' access to student information such as demographic data, student schedules, grades, attendance, and office discipline referrals, along with other information (West Virginia Education Information System, 1990). The researcher did not have access to the WVEIS database. The school principal provided all population demographic and ODR data to the researcher for each school year without any identifying information. Permission to conduct this study was provided by the school principal.

Chapter 3

Results

There was a total of 1, 648 Office Discipline Referral's (ODR's) during the pre-intervention (2008-2009 and 2009-2010) school years. There was a total of 790 ODR's during the 2008-2009 school year, and a total of 858 ODR's during the 2009-2010 school year. During the post-intervention (2010-2011 and 2011-2012) school years, there was a total of 1, 755 ODR's. There was a total of 863 ODR's during the 2010-2011 school year, and a total of 892 ODR's during the 2011-2012 school year. Data were analyzed using the Chi Square statistic to see if there was a statistically significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention ODR's. The Chi Square statistic was calculated for ODR data. Results indicated there was an increase in total ODR's post-intervention compared to pre-intervention ODR totals (see table 2 for Chi Square results). Figure 1 provides a graph plotting total ODR's for each academic year. An increase in ODR's occurred during the 2009-2010 academic year with 68 more ODR's than during the 2008-2009 academic year. This increase occurred prior to the implementation of the intervention. A small increase in ODR's occurred during the 2010-2011 academic year and total ODR's increased from 863 to 892 by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a school-wide positive behavior support intervention program in improving student bullying behavior in a single rural middle school. Although BP-PBS uses components of PBS in improving student and school wide behavior, which is supported by research, BP-PBS is not an evidenced based program. Total ODR's from two years prior to the implementation of the program (pre-intervention) and two years after the implementation of the program (post-intervention) were examined using the Chi Square statistic to determine if the program had a significant effect on ODR data. Results indicated an increase in total ODR's post-intervention compared to total ODR's pre-intervention. There are several possible implications that may suggest why this particular program was ineffective in improving student bullying behavior.

Was the Intervention Evidenced-Based?

One possible reason for the ineffectiveness of this intervention may be lack of knowledge or research conducted on the program. There is not enough research that suggests that this program is indeed evidence based. As mentioned previously, in order to be listed as evidenced based, extensive research on outcome studies must be conducted showing a positive effect on the specific program (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The only research that was found on the intervention was conducted by the authors of the program. More research examining the effectiveness of this program in improving student behavior is needed. Additionally, more research examining the effectiveness of this program on middle school populations is needed.

Barriers to Program Implementation

Implementation Fidelity & Consistency. Another possible reason for the ineffectiveness of this intervention may be due to infidelity of implementation. The ineffectiveness of most intervention programs is largely due to treatment inconsistency (Gresham, 2004).

Implementation fidelity is crucial when examining the effectiveness of an intervention program. Treatment fidelity, or integrity, refers to the degree to which the intervention is implemented as intended with accuracy and consistency (Gresham, 2004). Teachers and administrators must follow intervention procedures adequately if they hope to maximize their success with improving student behavior.

There are many barriers that can interfere with implementation fidelity of an intervention program. One barrier may be lack of knowledge among some of the teachers and staff on proper implementation. Although the program provided an initial training session for teachers, maybe teachers felt they did not have adequate knowledge in order to implement the program appropriately. Perhaps teachers needed more training than what was provided prior to the implementation of the program. Perhaps the problem solving team did not follow up with teachers regularly to assess if the program was being followed adequately and consistently. Research indicates that many intervention programs are not regularly monitored or assessed to ensure that they are implemented consistently (Gresham, 2004). Schools need to continuously monitor the implementation of their intervention program to assess their program's effectiveness, and to ensure that all staff are adequately trained and are appropriately implementing the steps of the intervention. Schools also need to ensure that professional development and re-training opportunities are provided to ensure that all teachers are knowledgeable and capable of implementing the intervention (Gresham, 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Lack of time may have been another issue that contributed to the inconsistency of implementation. Perhaps teachers may have felt that they did not have time to teach the curriculum of the intervention while also having to teach the regular curriculum. Gresham (2004) reported that lack of time was one of the most common factors attributing to treatment infidelity.

Poor School Climate. Perhaps the schools' climate and teachers' attitude did not change after the program was implemented. School climate has been found to be associated with fidelity of implementation (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Gresham, 2004; Ervin et al., 2007). Research suggests school climate is an important part of the school change reform and when support is not achieved by the majority of the staff then fidelity and inconsistency of implementation becomes a problem (Ervin et al., 2007; Horner et al., 2005; Slavin, 2004). Resistance to change typically occurs when something new and different is being implemented. When this occurs, teachers or staff do not believe the intervention will work; therefore they do not implement the program appropriately. As a result, implementation is inconsistent. Sugai & Horner (2006) indicated that an organization is characterized by the "extent to which the collective behaviors of an organizations membership move the organization toward the achievement of a common goal." Therefore, it is important for administrators to work to try to obtain staff support and to assess "readiness for change" before implementing a new program (Ervin et al., 2007). Schools should assess teachers' attitude toward a program before implementation and continuously assess teachers' attitudes after implementation. Some schools use scales and surveys to measure teacher attitudes such as the School Climate Survey.

Research indicates that sustained implementation of a program may be hindered by overuse of punitive strategies (Sugai et al, 2006). Many teachers continue to use punitive strategies as a means to decrease problem behavior despite what research proves of its ineffectiveness in

decreasing problem behavior. As mentioned previously, an overreliance on negative or punitive disciplinary actions is not only ineffective in decreasing the problem behavior, but it often leads to repeated offenses (Sugai et al., 2002; Sugai et al., 2006; Graham, 2011, Morrissey et al., 2010).

The Need for Additional Instruction

BP-PBS provides a curriculum that is taught to all students within the first six weeks of school. Students were taught skills they could have used in order to appropriately handle personal conflicts related to bullying. Perhaps students needed more than six weeks of instruction on how to use the key components of the program. Monthly, or even weekly, review sessions may have needed to occur in order to provide re-teaching and reviewing opportunities for all students. Adding opportunities for students to share success stories and/or current struggles with bullying to the BP-PBS curriculum could have been a useful tool in the re-teaching and reviewing process.

Limitations

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the intervention by examining total Office Discipline Referral's (ODR's) to measure student behavior. Perhaps administrators and teachers started paying more attention to behavior with the new intervention than before and efforts to report behavior were not as consistent. A change in the person responsible for monitoring behavior referrals can have an impact on ODR's as well. In this case, the assistant principal was responsible for discipline referrals and a change in assistant principal occurred during the 2010-2011 school year. This could greatly affect how ODR's were entered into the WVEIS database system as the degree of severity of some behaviors is based on opinion and professional judgment.

Another limitation was that there was only one measure of behavior (ODR's). Measuring total ODR's only accounted for students who were "caught" engaging in problem behavior. There may have been a number of students who were engaging in problem behavior but were not "caught". Therefore, the incident was not entered into the WVEIS ODR database. Also, using ODR's as the sole indicator of behavior presents the potential problem of possibly under identifying students with more internal problems such as depression and anxiety. This may include students who may be victims of bullying who may not have engaged in inappropriate problem behavior. As a result, these students may not be receiving appropriate interventions or positive behavior support. Using other measures, such as surveys or behavior rating scales, that assess symptoms of anxiety and depression could be helpful in identifying students who may need additional supports and interventions who otherwise may not be represented using ODR's alone.

Although the study measured ODR data two years prior to implementation and two years after the implementation of BP-PBS, more data are needed to determine if the program was effective in decreasing bullying behavior. Having additional data points may provide more information to determine if the intervention kept the ODR's from escalating or that the intervention had no effect on behavior.

There may be other factors contributing to the increase in violence in school. Research indicates that exposure to violence at home, in the community, and on T.V. increases aggressive behavior in children and adolescents (Finkelhor et al., 2009). A comprehensive nationwide survey of the incidence and prevalence of children's exposure in 2008 found that 60% of children surveyed were exposed to violence within the last year (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Research indicates that children who are exposed to long term violence are more likely to be

aggressive, suffer from anxiety or depression, and have conduct problems (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Future Research

More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of this program in improving bullying behavior in a middle school setting. Researchers may wish to evaluate additional sources of information to help identify students who could be under identified. Having students complete surveys or behavior rating scales could help to provide more targeted interventions or supports for students with more internal problems. A second area to examine is school climate. Using surveys such as the School Climate Survey will help problem solving teams gauge the perceptions of teachers and students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Working to increase teacher acceptance will help to improve the success rate. A third area to address is better implementation of the program. The program curriculum may need to be extended beyond six weeks to include more instruction on the components of BP-PBS and to review previously learned/taught content. Additionally, extra training and regular follow-up with teachers is needed to ensure that teachers are adequately implementing the program. Finally additional data will enable researchers to better analyze the trend of the data. An additional year of ODR's pre-intervention (2007-2009) and post-intervention (2012-2013) would help the researchers to better determine if the program had an effect on decreasing bullying behavior.

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Table 1

Population Demographics

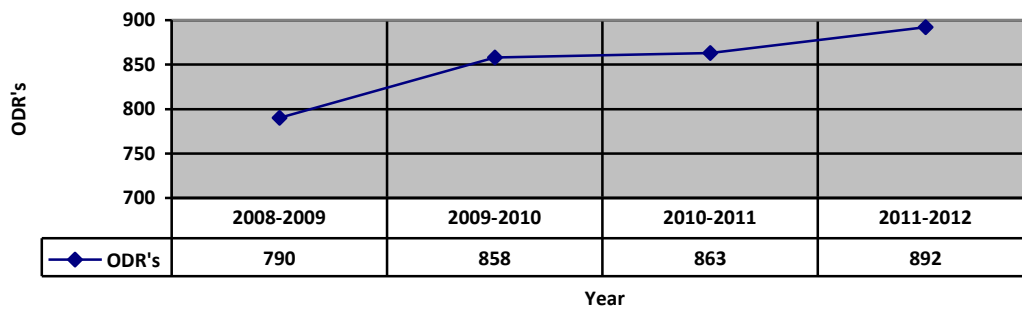
Measure	2008-2009 (N=467)		2009-2010 (N=444)		2010-2011 (N=478)		2011-2012 (N=469)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	249	53.32	246	55.41	256	53.56	252	53.73
Female	218	46.68	198	44.59	222	46.44	217	46.27
White	452	96.79	426	95.94	457	95.61	446	95.10
Black	14	3.00	16	3.60	18	3.76	20	4.26
Hispanic	1	0.21	1	0.23	2	0.42	2	0.43
Multiracial	0	0	1	0.23	1	0.21	1	0.21
Reduced/Free Lunch	282	60.38	267	60.13	293	61.30	293	62.47
Special Education	50	10.71	46	10.36	49	10.25	46	09.81
Grade- 5 th	110	23.55	119	26.80	133	27.82	109	23.24
Grade-6 th	120	25.70	109	24.55	116	24.27	131	27.93
Grade -7 th	107	22.91	119	26.80	106	22.18	116	24.73
Grade-8 th	130	27.84	97	21.85	123	25.73	113	24.10

Table 2

Chi Square Results

ODR's Pre- Intervention	ODR's Post Intervention	χ^2	<i>p value</i>
1, 648	1, 755	6.95	$p>0.05$

Figure 1

Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention ODR's



Office of Research Integrity

April 11, 2013

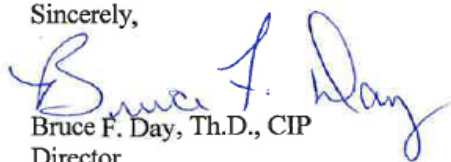
Sandra S. Stroebel Ph.D. NCSP
Associate Professor/Program Director
School Psychology Program
Marshall University
100 Angus E. Peyton Drive
South Charleston, WV 25303-1600

Dear Dr. Stroebel:

This letter is in response to the submitted abstract for Jennifer Tomblin to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bullying Prevention Positive Behavior Support Program (BP-PBS) utilized in a middle school in a rural community in southern West Virginia. After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study consists solely of a program evaluation involving deidentified data it is not human subject research and therefore not subject to Common Rule oversight. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you will need to resubmit that information for review and determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,



Bruce F. Day, Th.D., CIP
Director
Office of Research Integrity

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