

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
BULLYING BEHAVIOR

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviors in a Midwestern school at the secondary level. The sample of participants consisted of 20 secondary teachers. Bullying can be linked to school violence and the decrease of academic achievement and low self-esteem (Bulach, Fulbright, & Williams, 2003; Shears, 2002; Beane, 1999). The dynamics of bullying and the nature of the problem, according to teachers, were examined in the study.

Data were collected in the spring semester of 2004 in a small rural school district. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the secondary teachers who participated in the study. Teachers indicated when and where they believe bullying takes place. The types of bullying that occurred in the school were indicated by the results; in addition teachers

specified beliefs about adult supervision in relation to bullying behavior. Bullying behavior was believed to be a problem by most teachers; intervention with students was considered important.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Education (1997) has reported that approximately three million serious crimes take place at schools within the country annually, which means an average 16,000 major episodes occur each day. Almost 30 percent of students reported some to frequent participation in bullying behaviors, either as a bully, a victim, or a bystander (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2002b). However, a survey study done by Salmivalli (2001) discovered that a majority of the school-aged children responded that they believe “bullying is stupid” (p. 273). Bullying is happening in America’s schools daily.

Tragedy has been demonstrated through horrible events like school shootings and suicide among youth, and evidence shows bullying was a precursor to these events. A brutal attack took place in Conyers, Georgia when T.J. Solomon killed six fellow classmates. Bender, Shubert, and McLaughlin (2001) cited Solomon was viewed as a nerd, really shy and not popular by his peers. The victim of bullying became the perpetrator of a deadly attack. Similarly, in Littleton, Colorado Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 13 classmates and injured many others. “You deserve to die because you let this bullying go on,” Klebold had stated during his 1999 attack (Winter, 2001, p. 21). Klebold’s statement suggests bullying may have been a factor in these violent attacks. The violent attack of Harris and Klebold’s at Columbine High School was not the only possible result of the bullying they encountered, but also their committal of suicide, demonstrating suicide is also a potential outcome of unresolved bullying conflict. Another scenario explained by Hazler (2000), was the incident of Kelly, a thirteen year-

old girl who was consistently verbally abused by peers and clearly unwanted by others. She told her mother before she went to bed that she was sick of it and had enough of her classmates. She overdosed, committing suicide after being the victim of bullying. According to Bulach, Fulbright, and Williams (2003), violence in the schools is a significant effect of bullying behaviors.

Commonly bullying is thought to occur mostly in big cities, although bullying can take place in any size city. Infact, Olweus (1993) found that the amount of bullied students and bullies in large cities was lower than or similar to the amount in small towns. Dramatic incidents of school violence that have resulted from bullying have occurred in medium to larger sized cities, such as West Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Littleton, Colorado; but not Los Angeles, CA or New York City. On September 24, 2003 more shots rang out in a school, this time in Cold Spring, Minnesota, a town of less than 3,000 people. Jason McLaughlin, a 15 year-old, allegedly shot and killed one student, while shooting another who remained in critical condition until he passed away days later (Meryhew, Schmickle, & Haga, 2003). A classmate of McLaughlin attested, according to Burcum (2003), that he did not seem to have a lot of friends, and wondered if teasing about Jason's small size and bad acne had anything to do with his actions. Another classmate believed McLaughlin thought of himself as a victim of bullying (Meryhew, Schmickle, & Haga, 2003). Since bullying is a problem nationwide, in any size community, it is necessary to investigate the climate of bullying in schools of different sizes.

Bullying is an issue that must be addressed, as tragic events have succeeded those behaviors. In addition, bullying decreases self-esteem, increases school absences, and

decreases academic performance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Beane, 1999). As explained by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1995), the force with which bullying can impact the emotions of a student is obvious when 1 of every 20 students missed school at least one time in a month because the student felt unsafe on the way to school. Bullying behaviors need to be prevented and stopped. According to Hazler (2000), a strong influence for youth as they seek their identity is feelings of acceptance and worth from others. If a feeling of worth is not perceived, youth find a way to respond, whether it is by internalizing which leads to depression, or by externalizing, which leads to aggression.

Failure to address bully behaviors undermines school safety. In the last 10 years safety in school has been increasingly compromised (Shen, 1997). Schools are often viewed as one of the safest environment for children; contrary to that belief, 7-10% of school-aged children are occasionally involved in bullying during a school term, either as a bully or a victim (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Yet, important to remember that National Association of Social Workers (2002b) reported about 30 percent of students reported some to frequent participation in bullying behaviors, either as a bully, a victim, or a bystander. Research demonstrates many more students are affected by bullying than just the victim and perpetrator.

Although some teasing is a portion of normal development, there comes a point when teasing becomes bullying. Roberts (2000) explained that when manner, intensity, and incidence of teasing behaviors have increased it is an indication of teasing possibly turning into bullying. Identification of problematic behaviors is difficult for adults, as

some teasing behaviors are present for most people, yet level of seriousness is difficult to decipher (Hazler, 2000).

Bullying takes place in three forms: physical, verbal, and emotional. According to NASW (2002a), physical bullying can include poking, pinching, biting, hitting, choking, and beating, while verbal bullying may include name-calling, threats and spreading rumors. Emotional bullying can include all of the previously stated behaviors but also include exclusion, defamation of character, and blackmail.

Bullying is a clear problem in today's schools. Teachers and other school personnel need to take an active part in effecting the cessation of bullying behaviors. In a study conducted by Winter (2001), tenth-graders in a rural upstate school in New York said that they thought adults should stop bullying, and situations should not be allowed to go as far as they do. In addition, Winter found the most problematic areas were hallways, the cafeteria, restrooms, locker rooms, and school grounds. Atlas and Pepler (1998) investigated bullying in the classroom. They found that teachers intervened in only 18% of the episodes counted by the researchers. As the observations were video recorded, the teacher was viewed in the same frame as a bully encounter 50 % of the time. Teachers were unaware of a bullying interaction in 13 of the 30 episodes, and finally teachers were aware of 50 % of bullying when in close proximity of the interaction. Atlas and Pepler's study explained the influential nature of the teacher's roles in reducing bullying in a school, knowledge on what bullying behavior entails, as well as intervening tactics, for both the victim and the perpetrator.

Statement of the Problem

In this study the researcher sought knowledge of teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviors in a Midwestern school at the secondary level. Bullying has become a rising concern in schools producing an unsafe and emotionally detrimental learning environment for students. Data were collected during the spring semester of 2004 through a survey specifically designed for use in this investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviors in a Midwestern school at the secondary level. There were five objectives for this study. The objectives are:

1. To gain knowledge of the teachers' perceptions of the dynamics of bullying within a secondary school, which include: when bullying takes place, the amount of bullying that takes place, and the location of where bullying takes place.
2. To learn, according to perceptions of teachers, the types of bullying behaviors that occur in school among both boy and girl students.
3. To understand teacher involvement in bully behaviors in the secondary school setting, including teacher responses to student reports of bullying and teacher reactions to bullying behavior.
4. To recognize teachers' beliefs about adult supervision and how it relates to decreasing and preventing bullying behavior.
5. To gain insight about how school teachers' gender and years of experience impact views of bullying as a problem in the secondary school setting.

Definition of Terms

For clarification in understanding, the following terms are defined:

Bullying. "...student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p.9).

Negative Action. "...intentional infliction, or attempt to inflict injury or discomfort upon another" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). This behavior is carried out verbally with threats, name calling, teasing and taunting. Physically, the behavior is carried out by behaviors such as hitting, kicking, and pinching (Olweus, 1993). Emotional bullying can include spreading rumors, exclusion, extortion, defamation of character, and blackmail (NASW, 2002a).

Assumptions

The study assumed all participants answered all questions as honestly and accurately as possible. The study assumed that all participants used the same definition, provided by researchers, of bullying behavior.

Limitations

The population of this study was comprised of staff from one Midwestern secondary school; therefore generalizations should be made with caution, meaning a broad application of findings is inadvisable. In addition, the instrument used in this study has not been widely administered; therefore its validity is not well-established. Participants in this study were asked to self-report their perceptions of an existing problem, which is a limitation if they did not answer accurately or honestly.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying behavior is depicted in this chapter. Evidence is provided supporting the assertion that bullying is linked to violence in schools. The characteristics and outcomes of bullying behaviors are described for both the perpetrator and the victim. Typology of bullying behavior is explained with regard to the actual behaviors taking place. In addition, teacher awareness and responsibilities for intervention and prevention is explained. Intervention and prevention strategies are described including education of students and teachers about bullying behaviors.

Role of Bully Behavior in School Violence

According to Shen (1997), school violence is on the rise. Violence from the home and communities is stretching into the schools. Situations such as school shootings and suicide do not occur as the result of one awful school day. Rather school shootings and suicide are the result of the advancement of traumatizing encounters over time (Hazler, 2000). Social withdrawal, feelings of isolation, loneliness, persecution, and rejection, as well as low interest in school, and expression of violent writing and drawings are indications of a student bullying that often lead to violence (Beane, 1999). Shen (1997) also explained that the percentages of people who view weapons as being problematic in schools doubled between 1988 and 1994. Students who commit violent acts in schools are not normally the students known as trouble-makers or aggressive types. Aggressive students viewed as the bully usually do not commit the violent school crimes. Research shows that it is usually the victim of long-term bullying that commits violent school crimes (Bender, Shubert, & McLaughlin, 2001). Teachers do have a role in preventing

and reducing bullying. Both the victim and the bully look for a teacher's help; students who cannot solve a problem on their own depend on adults to help them (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000).

Dynamics of Bullying

Deciphering a bullying behavior from teasing behaviors can come with difficulty. Roberts (2000) explained that some teasing normally occurs during child development and is valuable in building social skills necessary to be assertive and stand up for themselves; it is the manner, incidence, and intensity that mark the behavior as bullying. In understanding bullying developmentally, the behaviors begin in elementary school, but reach their peak in middle school and begin to decrease in high school (Bulach, Fulbright, & Williams, 2003).

Bullying can be manifested verbally, physically, and emotionally. Physical bullying entails poking, pinching, biting, hitting, hair pulling, kicking, or beating (NASW, 2002a). Physical bullying such as this takes place more often among school-age boys than school-age girls (Olweus, 1993). Verbal bullying can include teasing, name calling, threats, and spreading rumors. In addition, emotional bullying can involve exclusion, extortion, defamation of character, or blackmail (NASW, 200a). NASW (2002a) also reported females were more likely to be bullied with rumors than males. Since girls have been found to be less physically aggressive than their male counterparts, their more subtle bullying behavior is overlooked by adults (NASW, 2002b). In a study conducted by Atlas and Pepler (1998), 53% of observed bullying episodes included verbal bullying, while physical bullying took place in only 30% of the observed episodes.

It is commonly believed that bullying takes place primarily on the way to and from school, but Olweus (1993) has reported that without a doubt most bullying takes place at school. In fact, Olweus (1993) found that three times more bullying took place at school than in route to and from school. Sheras (2002) explained that the locations within the school that are unsupervised like bathrooms and locker rooms are most often used by bullies.

Characteristics of Perpetrator

School-age bullies are unique in comparison to classmates due to their aggression toward peers. Sheras (2002) clarified that all students feel anger; bullies usually have an inability to channel their anger in an acceptable fashion. Beane (1999) explained that bullies are different from a student who may tease someone occasionally, because a pattern of intimidation forms. Perpetrators of bully behavior have little empathy for others, have a more positive attitude toward violence, and are aggressive to parents and teachers as well as their peers. (Olweus, 1993). According to Sheras (2002), bullies find victims who are weak in some way to harass in mental or physical ways.

Students who bully are looking to dominate others, as they are searching for a sense of control and balance (Olweus, 1993; NASW, 2002b). The National Association of Social Workers (2002b) explained that bullies are usually solely concerned with their own pleasure and will use others to get what they want. The selfish attitude of bullies is demonstrated by their unwillingness to accept others' ideas and unwillingness to negotiate while at play (Sheras, 2002). Given a bully's behavior of using others, one might think the bully would be friendless. However, The National Association of Social Workers (2002b) found that bullies are not always socially isolated, and it may even be

easy for bullies to make friends. In fact, Sheras (2002) indicated bullies are often average or above-average in popularity.

Outcomes for Perpetrator

Bullies may portray certain characteristics, which can still be identified even as perpetrators may not bully when under adult supervision. Bullies can often have a general personality with anger and unhappiness, while acting out physically instead of using words. Bullies are reported to have poor behavior at school with destruction of property, intimidation of younger children and a short attention span (Sheras, 2002). These negative behaviors can be linked to lifestyle outside of school beyond the years spent in school. Beane (1999) explained that 25 percent of adults with criminal records by age thirty were described as school bullies. It is important to remember that bullies later can be the victim of those they torment, as described by many of the school shooting incidents.

Characteristics of Victim

Bullies most often chose their targets based on the target's physical appearance, mannerisms, or the fact that the victim just does not fit in (Beane, 1999). Olweus (1993) explained that victims are usually more anxious and cautious than other students. Often times, especially with boys, victims are physically smaller. Victims usually grant their perpetrator with a "reward" such as their lunch or an outward show of fear or sadness (Beane, 1999; Olweus, 1993). As general rule, according to Olweus (1993), victims do not have friends, and withdraw from others. Sheras (2002) indicated that victims are often socially isolated and have a low self-esteem. Burcum (2003) stated that the perpetrator of a school shooting in Minnesota was a victim of bullying. Before the

incident the student socially withdrew by no longer wanting to ride the bus or hang out with friends as he usually did. The mannerisms of the student indicated he could have been a victim of bullying. Many students who are bullied are invisible to school personnel (Bender, Shubert, & McLaughlin, 2001). In the Minnesota school shooting incident, a teacher, described the bullied child as an ordinary kid (Burcum, 2003). School staff can have difficulties picking out children who are the victims of bullying.

Outcomes for Victim

Victims of bullying begin to show signs of the negative behavior experienced. Bullied students are reluctant to go to school, spend more time in the nurses' office and sometimes refuse to leave the house (Sheras, 2002). Therefore these students begin to spend less time in the classroom learning causing a sudden drop in grades. Twenty-two percent of fourth through eighth graders say they experience difficulties academically due to bullying (Beane, 1999). In addition to academic problems, bullying can lead to other negative feelings. Victims of bullying can become afraid of meeting new people, become frightened when approached by another child, and have more anger and resentment with no apparent reason (Sheras, 2002). Physically, explained by Sheras (2002), victims of bullying can experience more hunger due to fear of the cafeteria or their lunch being stolen, lack of sleep caused by nightmares, bedwetting, and pain due to waiting until getting home to use the bathroom.

Students' Involvement: Intervention and Prevention

Interventions for children should not only be directed to students who show characteristics of a bully or a victim, but should be preventative in nature for all students (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Intervention should begin early, focusing on attitudes against

bullying and perceiving the perpetrator negatively (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Bullying should be viewed as a negative behavior and not as a deserving behavior for any student. Salmivalli (2001) reported it is helpful to give students an opportunity to take responsibility when a bullying episode occurs. Sheras (2002) provided simple intervention tactics for students. Students can assertively ask a bully to stop, ask friends to help, notify adults of what is going on and continue to let adults know if the bullying continues. Salmivalli (2001) noted though, that it is also necessary for students to understand when things are too out of hand for them to be involved, in which case adults need to have ultimate responsibility for reducing bullying in the school.

Student influence can negatively or positively affect a bully situation. A peer onlooker of bullying is defined as child who is watching the bullying episode for at least five seconds of any portion of the episode (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). An onlooker of a bullying situation attempts to avoid the situation, for fear they may be the next victim if there is an attempt to intervene (Beane, 1999). There are peer interveners, as well. They are students who physically or verbally end the bully-victim interaction (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Peer onlookers are unhelpful in reducing bullying behavior, while peer interveners help to stop bullying episodes. A peer onlooker may be passively encouraging bullying behavior; perceptions that negative behavior is acceptable can be assumed by the bully. On the other hand, Newman, Horne, and Bartolomucci (2000) explained that peer onlookers are also considered to be bystander victims. Bystander victims are scared to report bully situations for feel they may be the next victim, yet carry guilt for not helping the victim of bullying. Students can be effective in the fight against negative actions among their peers, but it takes courage and support from adults in the school.

Teachers' Involvement: Intervention and Prevention

School climate is affected by bullying in schools. Bullying interferes with student achievement and development. Bullying also creates long-term negative social and emotional outcomes for students (NASW, 2002a). Teacher involvement with intervening and preventing bullying situations must not be avoided. Newman, Horne, and Bartolomucci (2000) indicate some core conditions for teachers to maintain to help in the intervention and reduction of bullying behaviors. Some of those conditions are: be a role model to set precedents and guide students, understand the different forms of bullying, be observant of the behaviors in the classroom which can allow for awareness of bullying situations, and believe in the ability to make a difference with students.

Visibility of adults can factor into school bully behavior. Beane (1999) reported that schools with helpful and visible principals experienced less violence than schools whose principals were unhelpful and invisible. Olweus (1993) found an inverse relationship between amount of adult supervision and bullying problems. However, Atlas and Pepler (1998) found in a study involving observations of bullying episodes that teachers intervened in only 18% of bullying episodes, and teachers were only aware of 50% of bullying episodes. The study demonstrated that teachers are not usually intervening bullying situations, and sometimes unaware of the bullying behaviors that take place. Understanding bullying behavior and the characteristics of those involved is necessary to intervene and prevent bullying from occurring.

Bullying is a serious offense that takes place at school. There are many possible harmful lasting effects of the negative behavior from bullies, experienced by victims, and witnessed by bystanders. Students can be helpful and preventing and intervening with

these bullying behaviors. Teachers, if they are aware of the behaviors, can be instrumental in the cessation of bullying in schools.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the protocol through which this study was conducted. The subjects from whom data was collected are described in detail. The instrument used in the study is depicted; its origin, its validity and reliability, along with its usage. Data collection is clarified in terms of method and time the data were collected, and the instructions given at the time of disbursement of the instrument. The data analysis will explain how the responses from the survey were quantified in order to meet the objectives of the study. Limitations will also be explained.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 20 secondary teachers in a small Midwestern public school district. All participants were employed as secondary teachers during the spring semester of 2004. Regardless of age or duration of employment in the district, all secondary teachers were provided in opportunity to complete the instrument.

Permission was received from district and school administration to ask for teachers' participation. In addition, the researcher explained to administration that all information gained from the study should be used to help improve or maintain a positive climate in the school rather than discipline the selected participants for ignorance in the area being studied. All teachers who participated were those who were identified as being secondary teachers.

Participants gave informed consent by turning the survey in after the purpose of the study, and confidentiality of responses was explained. The informed consent letter was tailored for use with teachers from its prior use with school support personnel, and

the instrument was used with permission from T. M. Sturz (personal communication, November 17, 2003).

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a survey asking for responses related to the teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviors in the school setting. Sturz (2000) designed the survey for use in gathering the perceptions of bullying from school support personnel. The survey was modified and used with permission from T. M. Sturz (personal communication, November 17, 2003).

The instrument examined teachers' awareness of bullying and their perception of bullying. The survey asked about bullying situations that were witnessed by teachers, as well as those they suspected had occurred or those that were reported. The survey explored further the dynamics of bullying such as where teachers perceive the behavior to take place, the type of bullying that takes place, and teacher reactions to the bullying behavior. The survey was adapted from the literature cited in Sturz (2000). The changes made to the survey included ideas generated by the literature in this study (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Beane, 1999; Hazler, 2000; NASW, 2002a; NASW, 2002b; Olweus, 1993; Roberts, 2000).

The instrument contained 13 questions on the perceptions of bullying from secondary teachers. In addition, the instrument asked for demographic information of gender and number of years of teaching experience. For each question, an assortment of answers was offered. This allowed the researcher to analyze the perceptions of bullying in the study. The instrument was designed specifically for the research of Sturz (2000);

her research committee found the survey to be valid for the study; therefore there were no other tests of validity and reliability available.

Data Collection

Data were collected in a Midwestern public school district. Surveys were distributed into all teacher mailboxes, giving every secondary teacher an opportunity to participate. A letter of informed consent was provided explaining the purpose of this study, the confidentiality of responses, and that participation was voluntary. In addition, participants were instructed to omit their names on the survey in order to guarantee confidentiality. Participants were directed to answer all questions honestly and as accurately as possible. All participants were given three weeks to complete the survey. Participants were directed to place completed surveys in an envelope in the high school guidance office. All surveys were picked up by the researcher at the termination of the three weeks in which data collection took place.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the results in this study to meet the study's objectives, data were quantified using primarily descriptive statistics. Once frequencies of the responses were determined, these results were cross-tabulated with gender and years of teaching experience. Results were reported as they pertain to each of the five research objectives.

Limitations

Several limitations in the data collection process of this study exist. One limitation was small sample size. Lack of accessibility precluded survey of additional schools. Generalizing any results to larger population should be done with caution. The validity of the instrument is not well-established as it has only been used in one other

study. Participants used self-report to answer all questions accurately and honestly, limiting the reliability of the answers.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter the results of a survey on secondary teacher's perceptions of bullying behavior in a Midwestern school district are disclosed. The demographic profile of the subjects who participated in the study will be presented first. Then, the research objectives will be discussed as they relate to the statistically significant results. Anecdotal responses relevant to the research objectives will be included.

Demographic Information

The participants of this study included 20 secondary teachers from one small school district. The sample in this study was comprised 65% (n=13) females and 35% (n=7) males. Four respondents reported working in the district 0-5 years, while six respondents reported working in the district for 6-10 years, and 10 respondents reported working in the district for 11 years or longer.

Item Analysis

The first two questions on the survey asked for demographic information, and those results are presented in the previous section. Questions three and four asked participants how often bullying is witnessed and suspected. Question three asked participants if, while working at school, they had witnessed someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely, and/or worthless. Respondents reported witnessing bullying as follows: 10% (n=2) daily, 55% (n=11) weekly, 30% (n=6) monthly, and 5% (n=1) once a year. Question four asked participants if, while working at school, they had suspected or been told about someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears

to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely, and/or worthless. Teachers reported that they have suspected or been told about bullying behaviors: 20% (n=4) daily, 20% (n=4) weekly, 55% (n=11) monthly, and 5% (n=1) once a year.

The next three questions dealt with the types of bullying that occur in schools. Question five asked teachers what type of bullying they believed to occur most in school. Thirty-five percent (n=7) reported most bullying in the school to be verbal bullying, 10% (n=2) believed most bullying to be equally physical and verbal, 40% (n=8) believed most bullying to be equally emotional and verbal, and 15% (n=3) believed most bullying to be equally emotional, physical and verbal. Question six asked teachers which type of bullying occurs most among girls in the school. Of the participants, 80% (n=16) reported equally verbal and emotional bullying occurs most among girls, only 10% (n=2) believed most bullying to be emotional, 5% (n=1) of teachers reported verbal as the main type of bullying among girls, and 5% (n=1) did not respond to this item. Question seven inquired about which typed of bullying occurs most among boys in the school. Of the teachers responding to the survey, 55% (n=11) believed a combination of physical and verbal bullying occurs most among boys, 20% (n=4) believed strictly verbal bullying occurs most among boys, and 20% (n=4) believed a combination of verbal and emotional bullying occurs most boys, and 5% (n=1) believed the bullying among boys is equally emotional, physical, and verbal.

Teachers participating in the study were asked to indicate when they believe most bullying to occur during a day. Question eight asked teachers, to the best of their knowledge, when they believe most bullying occurs. Of the teachers surveyed, 90% (n=18) believe most bullying takes place during school, while only 5% (n=1) believe

most bullying occurs before school and 5% (n=1) believe most bullying behavior happens after school.

The results of the two questions described in this section, explain the teacher's perceptions of the locations where bullying behaviors are witnessed and suspected. In question nine teachers were asked to indicate where at school, they have witnessed someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely and/or worthlessness. Teachers reported witnessing bullying in or at these locations: 10% (n=2) witnessed bullying on the athletic fields, 10% (n=2) bathrooms, 65% (n=13) cafeteria, 85% (n=17) classrooms, 45% (n=9) gymnasium, 100% (n=20) hallways, 25% (n=5) library, 30% (n=6) locker rooms and 40% (n=8) outdoor areas. Question ten asked teachers the locations, while working at school, they have suspected or been told about someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely and/or worthlessness. Teachers reported the following as locations where they have suspected or been told of bullying to take place: 35% (n=7) suspect bullying takes place on the athletic fields, 55% (n=11) bathrooms, 80% (n=16) cafeteria, 80% (n=16) classrooms, 65% (n=13) gymnasium, 85% (n=17) hallways, 30% (n=6) library, 65% (n=13) locker rooms, and 50% (n=10) outdoor areas.

The next two questions indicate the teacher's role in intervening bullying behaviors. Question eleven asked teachers if one or more students have reported bullying experiences to them. Ninety-five percent (n=19) of the responding teachers indicated yes, students had reported bullying to them, while only 5% (n=1) reported no, that students had not reported bullying to them. In question twelve, teachers were asked if

they believe themselves to have played an instrumental role in stopping bullying behaviors. Ninety-five percent (n=19) reported yes, they had played in instrumental role in stopping bullying, while one respondent (5%) reported neither yes nor no, only playing a somewhat instrumental role in stopping bullying behaviors.

The next two questions indicate teacher's perceptions of adult supervision of the prevention and reduction of bullying behaviors. Question thirteen asked teachers if they believed increased adult supervision would decrease bullying behaviors from occurring on and/or around school grounds. Seventy-five percent (n=15) reported increased supervision would decrease bullying, while 20% (n=4) believe increased supervision would not decrease bullying behaviors. One respondent commented that students are sneaky and they know what they can "get away" with more when no one is around. Question fourteen asked teachers if they believed increased supervision would prevent bullying from occurring on and/or around school grounds; 15% (n=3) believed increased supervision would prevent bullying behaviors while 80% (n=16) believed increased supervision would not prevent bullying. One participant explained a personal belief that being proactive and talking about bullying at each grade level is the most effective approach to preventing bullying.

The final question of the survey asked teachers to what extent bullying is a problem in the school district. Question 15 inquired how teachers characterize the bullying situation at the school. Ten percent (n=2) believe bullying is a large problem, 10% (n=2) believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, 50% (n=10) believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but showing signs of getting worse, and 30% (n=6) believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but showing signs of getting better.

Research Objectives

The results will be explained in their relation to the study's research objectives. The study's five research objectives are met with the summary of the results from the survey of the participants.

Objective one. The first objective of the study was to gain knowledge of the teachers' perceptions of the dynamics of bullying within a secondary school, which include: when bullying takes place, the amount of bullying that takes place, and where bullying takes place. An overwhelming 90% (n=18) of the respondents believe most bullying takes place during school. Bullying is witnessed often by teachers; 55% (n=11) of teachers responded they have witnessed bullying weekly and 30% (n=6) have witnessed bullying daily. In addition, bullying is often suspected by teachers; 55% (n=11) of the respondents suspected or had been told about bullying monthly, while 20% (n=4) of teachers reported they suspected or had been told about bullying weekly and 20% (n=4) suspected or had been told about bullying daily. Teachers were able to indicate where they perceive most bullying to take place. Sixty-five percent (n=13) of teachers witnessed bullying in the cafeteria, 85% (n=17) in the classrooms, and 100% (n=20) in the hallways. In addition, 50% (n=10) of teachers suspected or had been told about bullying occurring in outdoor areas, 55% (n=11) in the bathrooms, 65% (n=13) in the locker rooms, 65% (n=13) in the gymnasium, 80% (n=16) in the cafeteria, 80% (n=16) in the classrooms, and 85% (n=17) in the hallways.

Objective two. The second objective for this study was to learn, according to perceptions of teachers, the types of bullying behaviors that occur in school among both

boy and girls students. Some teachers, 40% (n=8) believed both equally verbal and emotional bullying occurred most frequently, while 35% (n=7) of teachers believed verbal bullying occurred most often. An overwhelming majority of the teachers believed verbal/emotional bullying, the type that equally takes place for all students, is the type of bullying that occurs most among girls. Of the respondents, 80% (16) believed a combination of verbal and emotional bullying occurred most among girls. Fifty-five percent (n=11) believed physical and verbal equally occurred most among boys.

Objective three. The third research objective was to understand teacher involvement in bully behaviors in the secondary school setting, including teacher responses to student reports of bullying and teacher reactions to witnessed and suspected bullying behavior. Most teachers reported that bullying had been reported to them; 95% (n=19) responded that students had reported bullying to them. In response to the student reports of bullying, a majority of the teachers believe they have helped in stopping bullying behaviors; 95 % (n=19) of the respondents reported they believe they have played an instrumental role in stopping bullying behaviors, while 95% (n=19) believe they have stopped the behaviors. When asked how they have stopped bullying teachers commented their ideas, such as having a meeting with the victim and the bully, reprimanding for unkind remarks, giving detention, and following the discipline procedures of the school.

Objective four. The fourth objective in the study was to recognize teachers' beliefs about adult supervision and how it relates to decreasing and preventing bullying behavior. Teachers were asked if they believed increased adult supervision would decrease bullying behaviors; 75% (n=15) of the teachers believed bullying would

decrease with an increase of adult supervision, while only 20% (n=4) believed increased adult supervision would not decrease bullying behaviors. Although most teachers believed increased adult supervision would decrease bullying behaviors, most teachers believed that increased adult supervision would not prevent bullying behaviors. Of the participants, 80% (n=16) believed increased adult supervision would not prevent bullying. Of the participants, 15.8% believe that increased adult supervision would both decrease and prevent bullying behavior, while 84.2% of the participants believed increased adult supervision would neither decrease nor prevent bullying behaviors.

Objective five. The final objective of this study was to gain insight about how school teachers' gender and years of experience impact views of bullying as a problem in the secondary school setting. Most of the teachers believe bullying is a problem in the school. Fifty percent (n=10) believe bullying is somewhat of a problem but getting worse, 30% (n=6) believe it is somewhat of a problem, but getting better, and 10% (n=2) believe bullying is a large problem. Those who believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting worse, included 53.8% of the females, but only 42.9% of the males. Bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting better is the opinion of 30.8% of the females and 28.6% of the males. The idea that bullying is a large problem is that of 7.7% of the females and 14.3% of the males who responded to the survey. Seventy-five percent of teachers with 0-5 years of teaching experience believed bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting worse and 25% of them believe it is a large problem. Of teachers reporting they have 6-10 years of teaching experience, 16.7% believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting better, 16.7% believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, 50% believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting worse, and 16.7%

believe bullying is a large problem. Lastly, of the teachers who have 11 years or more of teaching experience, 50% believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting better, 10% believe it is somewhat of a problem, and 40% believe bullying is somewhat of a problem, but getting worse. Although the sample size was too small to test groups for statistical differences, a trend was observed, that teachers who have taught for few years believe bullying is a more severe problem than teachers who have been teaching for many years.

Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to describe the results of the survey used with secondary teachers have to understand their perceptions of bullying behaviors in school. The statistics were used to help meet the study's research objectives, which look at the issues related to bullying. Teachers reported that they believe bullying is a problem in the school; their knowledge can be used to help prevent and reduce bullying behaviors at school.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter will include a discussion of the research and the results of the study. First a summary will review the purpose of the study and the method used to gather data. Limitations of the study will be discussed. Conclusions gathered from the results as they relate to previous research will be made. Recommendations for future research related to perceptions of bullying behavior are to be discussed.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of teachers' perceptions of bullying behaviors in a Midwestern school at the secondary level. An adapted survey from Sturz (2000) was used, which was specifically designed for the study. Data were collected and descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to meet the research objectives of this study.

The significance of studying perceptions of bullying behaviors stems from research that links bullying to school violence and other negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and poor academic achievement (Bulach, Fulbright, & Williams, 2003; Beane, 1999; Hazler, 2000). A determination from the findings of this study is that teachers believe bullying is at least somewhat of a problem, and half of the teachers believe the bullying problem is getting worse in schools.

Limitations

Several limitations to the study exist. The sample used in this study was very small, 20 participants from one small rural Midwestern school district, and so results of the study are not generalizable to a larger population. The instrument used in this study

has not been widely tested; therefore its validity is not well established. In addition, information provided by the participants was assumed to be true, as participants were asked to answer accurately and honestly. One participant did not answer all items on the survey, so results of all items were incomplete.

Conclusions

This study gathered secondary school teachers' perceptions of bullying as it is displayed in a small Midwestern school district. Of the 30 teachers eligible, 20 participated in the study. Much of the previous research is supported by results of this study.

Nearly all teachers surveyed believed most bullying to take place during school. This evidence supports the findings of Olweus (1993), who reported more bullying to occur at school than in route to and from school or before and after school. Bullying has been witnessed in the hallways by all of the teachers surveyed. The behavior was also witnessed in classrooms by 85% of the participants, and at least 80% of teachers reported suspecting or being told about bullying in hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria. This data partially supports the findings of Winter (2001), who found the most problematic areas to be hallways, the cafeteria, restrooms, locker rooms, and school grounds. This study did not find restrooms or school grounds to be primary areas where bullying was being witnessed or suspected by teachers.

With less supervision in the hallways and the cafeteria, the results confirm those of Sheras (2002), who reported that locations within the school that are unsupervised are most often used by bullies. Yet, classrooms, where there is teacher supervision, were perceived by many teachers as a place where bullying occurs often. In fact, Atlas and

Pepler (1998) found that teachers intervened in only 18% of the bullying episodes that took place in the classroom, where adult supervision is present. Most teachers believed bullying takes place in some supervised areas, although all teachers believed bullying takes place in the hallways, too, which is an unsupervised area. Bullying exists in locations where adult supervision is both present and not present.

Teachers believed that adult supervision can decrease bullying behavior, but not prevent the behavior. One respondent even commented that students will test limits to see what they can get away with, a finding which supports Hazler (2000), who reported the seriousness of negative actions can be difficult to define as either bullying or teasing. Beane (1999) and Olweus (1993) have found that when more adult supervision and adult visibility takes place fewer bullying behaviors occur. The results of this study support the findings of Beane (1999) and Olweus (1993) who suggest with more adult supervision there is less bullying; researchers did not conclude there was no bullying taking place with increased adult supervision, meaning increased adult supervision has not been found to prevent bullying behaviors.

The types of bullying that take in school were understood by the participants. Research (NASW, 2002a) indicated that females were more likely to be bullied with rumors than males, which is emotional bullying. The results of this study indicated teachers believe most bullying among girls is equally verbal and emotional bullying behaviors. Teachers believed most bullying among boys to include equally physical and verbal bullying behaviors. Among both girls and boys, verbal bullying is considered by secondary teachers to occur often among students, which was also observed by Atlas and

Pepler (1998) who found more bullying episodes that included verbal bullying than bullying episodes that included physical bullying.

Bullying is a problem in today's schools. Bullying can lead to decreased school performance, increased absences, lower self esteem, and bullying can be linked to violence and death (Beane, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Sheras, 2002). This study concluded that almost all teachers have had bullying reported to them. Teachers have a role in helping with the cessation of the negative effects of bullying.

Implications for Schools

This study indicated that bullying is a problem in the school setting. The negative behaviors can lead to a poor school climate, decreased student achievement, and tragic events. Results demonstrate that deciphering bullying behavior can be tough, therefore difficult to address. Since nearly all teachers responded that bullying has been reported to them, teachers know negative behaviors take place among students. Teachers who participated in this study commented on ways they intervene with students involved in bullying behavior. Comments included: classroom rules emphasizing respect and no bullying, talking to bullying and the victim separately, eliminating tension, and being a more visible teacher to students. These comments demonstrate teachers are a wealth of resources for intervention and prevention. In fact, Newman, Horne, and Bartolomucci (2000) indicated helpful conditions of a teacher, which include setting expectations, being a role model, and being observant; these conditions coincide the with participant's responses in the current study. This study demonstrates that if teachers can bring their ideas together with a plan to help students and other adults identify bullying, the negative behavior can be decreased or prevented.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research in this area include many areas. Researchers need data from a larger sample in a different population such as a large urban city, suburban community, or a different region of the country. The sample could include other support personnel, administration, and student's views of bullying behavior. The definition or behaviors that school personnel, parents or students constitute as bullying behaviors should be investigated. Intervention and prevention strategies for faculty, parents, and students should be investigated to find what best can help reduce bullying in the school.

In summary, bullying is an issue that is prevalent in today's schools. Bullying behaviors can lead to negative outcomes such as low academic achievement, low self-esteem, and violence. Bullying is perceived by teachers to be a problem in the school. Teacher awareness of the behaviors is helpful in the obstruction of the negative effects of the behaviors, as they happen mostly during school and in many supervised and unsupervised areas.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Teacher:

I am a graduate student at UW-Stout in the Guidance and Counseling (K-12) program. I am conducting a research study on the topic of “bullying,” because it is a very important topic in today’s schools. I have attached a brief survey to gather your perceptions of bullying at the secondary school level. The basic purpose of conducting the study is to determine the nature of bullying experiences in the secondary school as perceived by secondary school teachers. With your cooperation, I will collect data to complete the study.

You have an opportunity to participate in this study about bullying experiences of students in the secondary school by completing the brief survey at your convenience. Completed surveys will be placed in an envelope in the High School Guidance Center and will not be viewed until all have been collected to ensure confidentiality. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and, once again, confidentiality is guaranteed. Withdrawal from participation at any time during the study will be respected without adverse consequences. There is minimal risk to you in filling out this survey. If at any time you experience discomfort as a result of the survey’s questions, please call the researcher, Janell Dahlheimer, her advisor, Barbara Flom, or Sue Foxwell at the numbers below. Results of the study will be available to all faculty members interested in learning about bullying and the continuing efforts of creating a positive learning environment from the researcher, Janell Dahlheimer.

It is understood that by returning the survey, you are giving your informed consent as a participating volunteer in the study. Additionally, you understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are small. You also understand the potential benefits such as an improved school environment that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. You are aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that no names are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. Furthermore, you realize that you have the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw from participation at any time during the study.

Note: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed to either the researcher, Janell Dahlheimer at (715)231-4479 or research advisor, Barbara Flom at (715) 232-1343, or to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Vocational Rehabilitation Building, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

APPENDIX B: Bullying Survey

Bullying Survey

Participation in completing this survey is voluntary, and confidentiality is guaranteed. This means nobody else will know how you answered. By returning this survey, you are giving your informed consent to participation in this study. **Do NOT write your name on this paper.**

Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please answer items as accurately and honestly as possible.

Please circle one answer that applies to you in items #1-2:

1. Gender: Female or Male

2. Years of Teaching Experience: 0-5 years

5-10 years

10 + years

Please read the following definition:

Bullying - a situation when one or more students are repeatedly cruel to another students for a period of time, weeks or even months.

Bullying Behaviors can be:

- a) **physical** - hitting, kick, pushing, etc.
- b) **verbal** - threats, name calling, teasing, taunting, etc.
- and/or**
- c) **emotional** - exclusion, blackmail, spreading rumors, etc.

Use the previously stated definition of bullying answering items #3-15:

3. While working at school, **I have witnessed** someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely, and/or worthless. **(Please mark only one choice.)**

Daily Weekly Monthly Once a Year Never

4. While working at school, **I have suspected or been told about** someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely, and/or worthless. **(Please mark only one choice.)**

Daily Weekly Monthly Once a Year Never

-Please Continue to #5 on the Next Page

APPENDIX B: Bullying Survey

5. I believe **most** bullying in this school is this type:

(Please mark only one choice.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Verbal Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> All Equally
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Emotional Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal & Emotional Equally	

6. I believe **most** bullying among **girls** at this school is this type:

(Please mark only one choice.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Verbal Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> All Equally
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Emotional Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal & Emotional Equally	

7. I believe **most** bullying among **boys** at this school is this type:

(Please mark only one choice.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Verbal Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> All Equally
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & Emotional Equally	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal & Emotional Equally	

8. To the best of my knowledge, I believe **most** bullying occurs:

(Please mark only one choice.)

Before School During School After School Never

9. While working at this school, **I have witnessed** someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely and/or worthlessness in which of the following locations (**Mark all that apply**):

<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic Fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/> Library
<input type="checkbox"/> Bathrooms	<input type="checkbox"/> Gymnasium	<input type="checkbox"/> Locker Rooms
<input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Hallways	<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Areas

10. While working at this school, **I have suspected or been told about** someone bullying to the extent that the student being bullied cries or appears to feel frustrated, sad, anxious, bad, angry, lonely and/or worthlessness in which of the following locations (**Mark all that apply**):

<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic Fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/> Library
<input type="checkbox"/> Bathrooms	<input type="checkbox"/> Gymnasium	<input type="checkbox"/> Locker Rooms
<input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Hallways	<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Areas

-Please Continue to #11 on the Next Page-

APPENDIX B: Bullying Survey

11. One or more students have reported bullying experiences to me:

Yes No

12. I believe that I have played an instrumental role in stopping bullying behaviors:

Yes* No**

*If "Yes," please explain what you did to stop the bullying:

If "No," mark **all the following that apply to you:

I did not know how to intervene.

I did not receive support from other school personnel.

I do not feel that it is my place or duty to intervene.

13. I believe increased adult supervision would *decrease* bullying behaviors from occurring on and/or around school grounds:

Yes No Not aware of any bullying taking place

14. I believe increased adult supervision would *prevent* bullying behaviors from occurring on and/or around school grounds:

Yes No Not aware of any bullying taking place

15. Overall, I would characterize the bullying situation at this school:

A large problem.

Somewhat of a problem, and showing signs of getting worse.

Somewhat of a problem, but showing signs of getting better.

No problem at all.

Thank You for your participation in this study.