



School Bullying: Discrepancy Between Students' and Staff Members' Perceptions and Reports - Preliminary Findings

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INTRODUCTION

Many studies have shown that bullying has become a growing concern for teachers, parents, and students alike, and that awareness of the pervasiveness of such aggression has increased. Although the literature to date strongly demonstrates the negative impact that bullying has on students at all grade levels, there has been a strong support of the idea that bullying is most pervasive at the elementary level than any other level (Salmivalli, 2002). However, few studies have been done assessing bullying behavior in the middle school.

In addition, although the awareness of bullying problems has increased, recent studies demonstrate discrepancies between students' and school staff 's perceptions of the prevalence, attitudes, characteristics, and prevention efforts of school bullying (Bradshaw, Sawyer & O'Brennan, 2007; Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001).

The following data should only be considered preliminary in nature, and focuses solely on students' reports and perceptions.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine middle school students' and school staff 's reports and perceptions of school bullying on all of the core elements, which include negative behaviors such as name-calling, hitting, and excluding, power differentiation, intent to harm, and repetition of the behavior. In addition, the study will also assess the possible discrepancy between middle school students' and school staff 's perceptions and reports.

Six research questions were examined:

What are students' perceptions and reports of : (Q1) the prevalence of bullying (Q2) the location of bullying (Q3) who they talk to when bullying occurs (Q4) the effectiveness of telling a staff member about a bullying incident (Q5) the reasons why bullying occurs, and (Q6) the characteristics of bullies and bully victims.

METHOD

Participants

The current sample included 571 students from one middle school in the mid-west.

To ensure anonymity among participants, students were only asked their sex (49.8% male, 53.2% female), grade (36.2% 6th, 35.2% 7th, 28.6% 8th) and academic grades in school (majority indicated "Mostly As" and "As and Bs").

Materials

Students completed a 64-item anonymous paper-based survey adapted from *My Experiences with Classmates at School-Revised* (Davidson & Demaray, 2007) regarding their perceptions and reports of bullying at their school.

The survey addressed the occurrence, location, prevalence of and reasons for bullying. It also addressed whom students tell and the effects of telling. The core elements of bullying, power differentiation, intention to harm, and repetition were included in the survey.

Procedure

Prior to the collection of data from each individual student, parents received a paper-based and electronic passive consent form.

Willing students completed the survey in their study hall.

On the day of data collection, teachers distributed a consent form to each student, explained to the students that the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that the school counselors and the school psychologist were present for consultation.

When the students were completed, teachers personally collected the surveys. Teachers brought the surveys to the Student Services office at some point before the end of the day and placed them in a box titled "Student Surveys."

RESULTS

LOCATION OF BULLYING

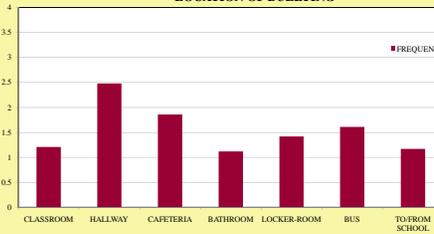


Figure 1. Bar chart displaying students reports of the frequency of bullying in specific locations.

Students reported that bullying occurs most often in the hallways, in the cafeteria, and on the bus (0 = "never", 4 = "always").

WHO STUDENTS TALK TO

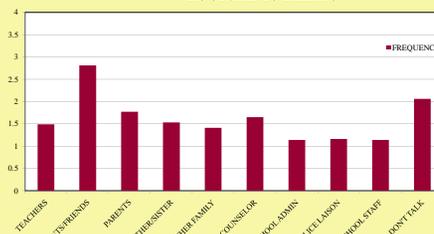


Figure 2. Bar chart displaying students' reports of who they talk to when bullying occurs.

Students reported most often telling other students and/or friends, or not telling anyone when bullying occurs (0 = "never", 4 = "always").

VICTIMS' REPORTS

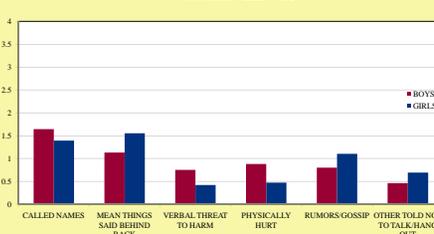


Figure 3. Bar graph displaying students' reports of the frequency of different forms of bullying they have experienced.

More boys than girls experienced being called names ($p=.034$), receiving verbal threats ($p=.000$), and being physically hurt ($p=.000$). More girls than boys experienced others saying mean things behind their back ($p=.000$), gossip spread about them ($p=.002$), and having others told not to talk to or hang out with them ($p=.006$).

BYSTANDERS' REPORTS

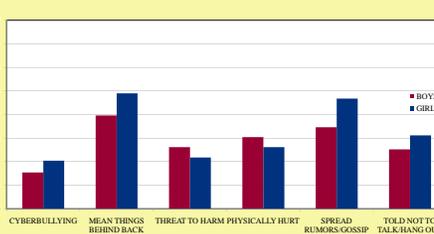


Figure 4. Bar graph displaying students' reports of witnessing different forms of bullying.

More boys than girls reported witnessing others being threatened ($p=.046$) and being physically harmed ($p=.006$). More girls than boys reported witnessing cyber bullying ($p=.011$), and witnessing others saying mean things behind others' back ($p=.000$), spreading rumors and gossiping ($p=.000$), and telling students not to talk to or hang out with another student ($p=.010$).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was predicted that bullying would occur more frequently in under-supervised locations. As was suspected, students reported that bullying occurred most often in the hallways and on the bus (Figure 1). These results suggest that middle school staff members may need to increase supervision outside of the classroom, especially during transitional periods (passing time, on the bus). It was also predicted that students would avoid speaking with adults about bullying situations, as they may assume that adults may make the situation worse. As was predicted, students reported most often telling other students and/or friends, or not telling anyone at all when bullying occurs (Figure 2). These results suggest that school staff members and other adults may underestimate the prevalence of school bullying, as many bullying incidences go unreported.

As seen in past research, boys reported being victims of and witnessing more verbal and physical bullying, while girls reported being victims of and witnessing more relational bullying (Figures 3 and 4).

LIMITATIONS

This study has the following limitations:

First, this study was conducted in one middle school in the mid-west; therefore, additional studies should be conducted to validate the efficacy of these results across settings.

Second, the data were collected through self-report measures, and thus social desirability may have influenced the responses.

Third, the survey included and the study hall teachers read the definition of bullying; however, it is unclear whether the students and school staff consistently applied the definition when answering the individual questions.

Finally, it was mentioned on several surveys that there were too few options regarding the frequency of bullying.

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