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UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION MAJOR'S PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

by
Drew Anders

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by _____
Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Drew Anders

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION MAJOR'S PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING 2007/08

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Masters of Arts in School Psychology

This study intended to focus on the realities of bullying through the eyes of undergraduate education majors. Perceptions on their understanding, and responses to hypothetical situations were examined to get a thorough comprehension about their beliefs on the topic of bullying. The sample of 144 participants, 105 female and 39 male, were all juniors or seniors in their educational programs at a medium-sized university in the northeast. Two questionnaires, the Boulton & Jones Questionnaire and the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire, were used as tools to assess the student's ideas about the subject. Tests of significance helped support the hypothesis by showing that students viewed relational forms of bullying significantly different when compared to physical and verbal forms; for example, participants were least likely to intervene with relational depictions than the other two. A specific focus on the undergraduate's perceptions of training (future and past) resulted in a significant correlation between the two subscales. The present study's findings helped support current literature, and future implications are recognized to stimulate future research in regards to better educational and training efforts for school professional trainees.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Need

Controlling violence is always at the heart of our American society, and this country has always made the safety of our youth in schools a prerequisite. Recent legislation showed an example of this with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which ensures that school safety remain a major concern for school districts across the U.S. Fortunately, research has given way to a sense of urgency to help reduce the amount of bullying in our country. The effects of bullying can be detrimental on an entire school system, not to mention that bullying is the most common form of low-level violence in the U.S. today (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). To help battle this issue, prevention programs have been created and implemented in countries all around the world.

The fear of being bullied is so great that an estimated 160,000 students stay home from school every day in the U.S. (Vail, 1999, as cited in Dupper & Whitted, 2005). An imbalance of power is created in bullying relationships, and when you combine this with the fear that is already present, the school environment becomes a place that seems unsafe in the minds of students. Teachers have a hard time detecting when bullying occurs and how often because they are only taking notice in limited fashion (Fontanini & Skiba, 2000). Students misunderstand the situation because they have general assumptions that the bullied student is usually at fault and the teasing will make them tougher. They also believe that teasing is mainly done “in fun”, and even if they reported it that nothing will be done anyway. These negative misconceptions are part of the reason why bullying goes undetected most of the time.

The effect of bullying can negatively impact the entire school system. Students who bully others seem to start down a path that leads to further antisocial behavior. Bullies tend to hang around other aggressive children and become involved in gangs (Craig and Pepler, 1999). Victims take the brunt of the abuse of course, and overtime they may develop physical and psychological problems that can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and even suicide. Victims of bullying are likely to develop school-related problems, such as dislike of school, high dropout rates, and avoidance of public areas in school (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). Bystanders of bullying also are greatly affected in the situation as well. Research has found that witnesses view bullying as very distressful and unpleasant, but more importantly they fear they might become new targets of the bullies in the future (Olweus, 1993). All of these interactions and feelings will continue to take place as long as bullying occurs, and it is these outcomes that can make students feel insecure with their school system.

Radical action to reduce this problem has taken place in the past quarter of a century; prevention programs have been designed that require the entire community to get involved for the best chance of a happier ending. The message that needs to be sent to students is one that is clear and concise. "Bullying will not be accepted or tolerated in our school and we will see that it comes to an end." One example found reductions by more than 50% in bully/victim problems, general antisocial behavior also reduced, and the social climate of the classrooms improved while the students increased their satisfaction with school life (Olweus, 2003). Positive results like these make the efforts to prevent and limit bullying quite imperative.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how teachers in training perceive the topic of bullying. This examination let undergraduate education majors express their views toward bullying and respond to different scenarios depicting bullying.

Significance of the Study

The topic of bullying has created quite a stir in society; some have even called the situation at hand an epidemic. Call it what you will, the fact is the issue seems to be affecting a higher rate of our youth than ever before; approximately 30% of children experience recurrent association with bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). Research on bullying began back in the 1970's, but our society has not been able to reduce the severity of the issue in a grand scale.

The realities of this topic are not seen equally between school professionals and students (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). The differences in their perceptions on bullying are a large reason why it remains such a big problem in our schools. There has been limited research done on the perceptions of preservice school professionals. A dissertation was recently completed that studied 188 graduate student's perceptions on the realities of bullying (Stankiewicz, 2007). This specific study was one of the first of its kind to assess the opinions of all school professionals, not just teachers. Through this study's examination we can get a better understanding of where we need to focus training methods for future school professionals in regards to bullying. We need to reduce the gap between students and school professional's understanding on this problem. If we figure how to improve our training and education on bullying for new and future teachers, then hopefully prevention efforts can become more successful.

Hypothesis

There will be slight differences in how these students define and understand the realities of bullying. There will be significant differences in how these students will interpret and respond to different bullying scenarios. In particular, participants will think relational forms of bullying are less problematic and they will deal with them differently.

Definition

The construct we are dealing with must be understood and accepted. The definition of bullying is a construct that unfortunately doesn't have a definitive answer. Instead, people can be influenced with how they view bullying by the culture they live in and the experiences they have had. Through my research though, I found some consistent characteristics that seemed to present themselves as themes that describe bullying. It is a type of negative behavior that is repeated over time to a certain individual by one person or a group of people. An imbalance of power is present during an interaction, usually leaving the person who is being bullied feeling unprotected. This negative behavior or abuse can be expressed in different ways: (a) physically (hitting, kicking, etc.), (b) verbally (name calling, etc.), (c) emotionally (exclusion, gossip, etc.), (d) sexually (assault, harassment), and (e) hazing.

Assumptions & Limitations

During this research, a few assumptions were considered. It was assumed that the participants of this study have the ability to understand what is being asked of them. In answering the questions, it was assumed that these students truly believed their identity would remain anonymous, so they would appropriately answer all questions honestly and carefully. It was also assumed that the location and environment the study was

conducted in was favorable for the participation to take part without any extraneous problems.

This research was unable to stay clear of certain limitations. The ability of these results to be generalized well is small because the study was done at only one school in a specific geographic location. It is hard to say that these results would relate to other areas because the size of the sample was only moderately sized (n=144). In regard to the vignettes that were used for the one questionnaire, it was understood that this type of assessment falls short of actual observational analysis. The participants answered how they think they will act in the future, but there is unfortunately no telling whether or not their intentions at the present time will carry over to a specific, future event.

Overview

Before I explain the methodology of this study, a review of the current literature surrounding this topic will be critically discussed. Bullying has been researched from many different viewpoints, and it will be helpful to see what connections have been made in order for us to get a better understanding of how to conceptualize the problem. Chapter 2 will include topics in bullying such as, prevalence, problems caused by bullying, anti-bullying programs, and the perceptions of all the parties involved. These discussions will hopefully bring us up to date on the current literature that has focused on bullying from a variety of unique angles. By the end of Chapter 2 I hope I give a sense of the direction and purpose I am heading in for my present research. This should provide a good background to where I want to extend or at least partially replicate past research. Chapter 3 will then give the reader a view of how my study is designed and how it will unfold from beginning to end. I will go into detail about the procedure and the different

measures I am using to complete my surveys. In Chapter 4 I will provide descriptions on the results of how my actual study unfolded. Analyses, hypothesis, and correlations will be discussed to give the readers a thorough understanding of the data I collected. Finally, I will conclude with Chapter 5 by explaining possible future implications about the results from my study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

This review of literature will attempt to explain many different aspects associated with bullying. More specifically, there will be critical examination on bullying research that revolves around the perceptions school professionals have on the topic. This in-depth analysis should help provide a good base for the purpose of my study, which will hopefully be extending the current research. An extensive investigation that examines the topic of bullying can help paint a picture that is very bleak, but real. Bullying is an issue of significant importance for the wellbeing and safety of our youth around the world (Nansel et al., 2004). The research conducted on bullying is not limited by any means; it seems that there are sufficient amounts of consistent findings that can help us all understand bullying on many different levels. Although, Kim, Koh & Leventhal (2004) concluded that further research and study can only do so much; public health action needs to be implemented now.

Prevalence

In the last decade alone, bullying research has been on the rise and has been conducted in many countries: England (Wolke et al., 2001), Norway (Natvig et al., 1999), Korea (Kim, Koh, & Leventhal, 2004), Australia (Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006), Greece (Andreou, 2000), Holland (Fekkes et al., 2005), Italy (Smorti & Ciucci, 2000), Wales (Arseneault, 2006), United States (Nansel et al., 2001), Canada (Craig & Pepler, 2007), Germany (Wolke et al., 2001), Netherlands (van de Wal, de Wit & Hirasing, 2003), New Zealand (Nairn & Smith, 20002), Spain (Ortega & Lera, 2000), Ireland (O'Moore, 2000),

and Northern Ireland (McGuckin & Lewis, 2006). This shows a partial glimpse of the global effort that has been examining bullying, but a lone researcher in Scandinavia named Dan Olweus is the main reason bullying is finally receiving the concern it needs. His continued support has provided contributions towards research that has spanned for about 4 decades. His efforts have all been pursued by surveying thousands of Norwegian and Swedish students. His anti-bullying program has also helped pioneer a path towards proper prevention and intervention techniques in school. Many researchers from all around the world have used his research to start in their own direction.

Bullying in schools has been found to be customary in countries all around the world, but the rates of incidence seem to vary from between 9% and 54% of the school population being involved in bullying (more than twice during current term) (Nansel et al., 2004). This study collected data from 113,000 students aged approximately 11, 13, and 15 years from a HBSC Study of 25 countries in Europe and the U. S. The schools were nationally represented and randomly chosen. Another group of practitioners also used the same data set, but different measures were used and still consistent findings with student's involvement in bullying situations were found (Due et al., 2005). Both studies found the least amount of bullying is occurring in Sweden, and the highest rate was found in Lithuania. Domestically, the first national study completed in the U. S. was represented with 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10, and researchers also used findings from the 1998 HSBC surveys (Nansel et al., 2001). Nearly a third of the student's surveyed reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying. This report by JAMA is a large reason why the issue of bullying has been a hot topic in the U. S; it helped make the public more aware. The previous three studies mentioned represent

national and international comparisons that help display the realities of bullying. Many other studies, expressing percentages of prevalence have been completed on a smaller scale, but still deserve consideration (Glew et al., 2005; Fekkes et al., 2005; Bond et al., 2001; Chappell et al., 2004 & 2006; Veenstra et al., 2005; McGuckin & Lewis, 2006; Natvig et al., 1999; Nairn & Smith, 2002; Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004).

It should be noted and understood that there are many different measures researchers can use to determine their results, and it is this methodology that can create a wide assortment of outcomes in assessing bullying. Furthermore, the definition of bullying is inconclusive, and it is this weak base that can lead researchers and school professionals to assess bullying from their own understanding and/or culturally defined perspective. Each country has their own distinct national policy, and their school systems also create an environment that can vary (e.g. start schooling at different ages) for each country. Researchers have conducted studies of varying size, and assess the rate of bullying occurrence (e.g. three or more times per term, sometimes or more, to once a week) differently. All of these considerations can have an influence on the prevalence of bullying, and should always be considered when reviewing research and/or examining what type of intervention program a school system might want to implement.

There have been more factors that are studied when considering the research on bullying frequency. Do different age groups experience contrasting levels of bullying? The research seems quite clear when it comes to this question because bullying seems to decrease as students get older (from elementary school to the end of high school) (Smith et al., 1999). In Nansel et al. (2001) the regularity of bullying was higher among 6th through 8th grade students than among 9th and 10th grade students. Glew et al. (2005)

attempted to further Nansel's 2001 study by examining children in lower grades (prior to sixth). Their study found that frequent bullying among elementary school children was substantial because 22% of the children surveyed were involved in bullying. Other countries have previously noted that the most common years to bully are among student's first years in school (Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Even in a recent cross-national study this was evident because the prevalence of bullying decreased with age in 27 of the 28 countries considered (Due et al. 2005). To contradict this popular finding Chapell et al. (2004) focused on bullying in college since this research is limited. They found that 60% of students reported having observed a student being bullied by another student, while 40% of the group reported observing a teacher acting as the bully towards another student. These findings conclude that the issue of bullying continues to present itself on college campuses, and that bullying might decrease with age less than first thought. Furthermore, Glendenning (2001) examined how bullying remains somewhat common among adults in the workplace. These findings suggest that there is a larger amount of bullying that goes underreported as people get older. Chapell (2004) stated that the issue of bullying on college campuses should receive greater attention (p.10). The amount of bullying does seem to change overtime for different age groups, but the roles that students uphold (e. g. bully, victim) seem to remain much more stable throughout a student's educational journey (Chapell et al., 2006).

Does the ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or special label of a student alter their chance of involvement with bullying? The issue of ethnicity is important because the comparisons can help figure out how different racial groups deal with and/or accept the problem of bullying. Each unique demographic and their interplay within society are

important factors to examine in order to understand how a culture might view bullying. In a study of all African American adolescents, higher rates were found compared to those in nationally represented samples (Fitzpatrick et al., 2007). The authors did note though that their results were difficult to generalize because they only studied African Americans instead of a group of diverse students. Nansel et al. (2001) concluded that Hispanic youth reported slightly greater involvement, while black youth claimed being bullied with considerably less occurrence overall. Another study compared the rate of bullying involvement between Hispanics and African Americans, and 24% of the students in their sample reported participation which is consistent with other bullying research (Peskin et al., 2006). Unfortunately, their method of measurement limits their overall generalization, but the findings still suggest that research, which is limited in this area, needs to be further examined on many different levels to better understand how different populations are affected and ways in which they can be helped.

The factor of socioeconomic status (SES) seems to create mixed results in the literature. Glew et al. (2005) found that low SES backgrounds were not associated with involvement in bullying in any way. Additionally, Nansel et al. informed us that they found small to no major differences in the frequency of bullying participation (2001). Weak SES differences were also described in Wolke et al. (2004). On the other hand Peskin et al. (2006) found a significant amount of bullying was prevalent among a group of low SES students.

The world of special education within schools is growing as the mental health practices keep improving. Although putting a label on students (e. g. mentally retarded) can present the student with greater chances of being bullied than non-disabled students

(Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994). Children with behavioral disorders have a tendency to show patterns of behavior that are similar to bullies, so it is apparent that students with certain forms of disabilities have an increased chance of bullying association simply because of the physical and emotional characteristics they have (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Mishna (2003) extended the limited literature on learning disabilities (LD) and bullying, and came to the conclusion that a student with LD is more susceptible to bully involvement. The combination between these two facets constitutes a 'double jeopardy' for the student (p. 336). Investigating the special-needs populations in schools is an area of bullying research that needs to be focused more on (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). It is important to figure out if bullying occurs just because students are different than one another. Diversity within schools is increasing in the U.S. now more than ever, so it would be beneficial if our diverse youth were better understood when it comes to the subject of bullying.

Are there any differences between males and females with their affiliations in the bullying paradigm? There does not seem to be one clear cut answer for this question because it depends on the type of bullying that is occurring and the status held by the individual. Studies have found males to be more likely to participate in physical bullying (e.g. hitting, pushing), and to report bullying and victimization more often than females do (Nansel et al., 2001 & 2004; Rigby & Slee, 1991; Rigby 2000; Whitney & Smith 1993; Kim et al., 2004; Olweus, 2003). Although females seem to be more prone to interacting in relational forms (e. g. spreading rumors, rejection) of bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Rivers & Smith, 1994; Borg, 1999; Olweus, 2003), but some studies

have shown extremely small or no gender differences (Peskin et al., 2006; Due et al., 2005; Prinstein et al., 2001).

Bullying is a universal phenomenon that seems to be prevalent in school systems all over the world. The age, sex and ethnicity of an individual do not seem to hinder the possibility of their involvement in bullying all that much. Millions of our youth around the world are facing the realities of bullying each and every day in schools, and unfortunately bullying can have many negative consequences for all parties involved.

Effects of Bullying

The issue of bullying creates harmful possible results for both the school system and all the children involved in the bullying situation. Student's roles during bullying experiences can fall along a continuum; there can be victims, bullies, victim/bullies (experience each role), and bystanders. Each part to the network is unfortunately affected negatively by bullying involvement.

Two large, nationally represented studies express how the effects are real no matter what country students are from. The large, cross-national represented study conducted by Nansel et al. found that all participants in the bully equation demonstrated poorer psychosocial adjustment than noninvolved youth in all of the 25 studies considered (2001). Nansel et al. also found similar results in their large study; in all of the countries they considered, bullying was associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment (2004). To go along with those findings an international comparative cross sectional study also found that for 12 different physical and psychological symptoms, and in all of the 28 countries there was a graded association between bullying and each

symptom separately and high total symptom load for both boys and girls (Due et al., 2005, p.129).

To be more specific, the effects from bullying association vary depending on the status held by the individual. In some ways bullies and victims are both at risk for emotional, social, and psychiatric problems (Nansel et al., 2001; Craig, 1998; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999 & 2000). Academic achievement is hindered for all individuals that are involved with participation in bullying (Juvonen et al., 2000). Olweus notes that victims are more likely to have internalizing problems (e. g. depression); while bullies are more inclined to have externalizing issues (e.g. alcohol abuse) (1993). It has also been noted that victims tend to suffer physically with poorer health (e. g. headaches, feeling ill, losing sleep) (Rigby, 2003; Slee et al., 1994). Bystanders are also considered a part of the bullying paradigm, and they too express feelings of being afraid, which might be the main reason a small percentage of them intervene to help stop bullying (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Students who fit into the bully/victim role might have an increased risk of harmful repercussions from bullying (Fekkes et al., 2005). Their role has its own distinct characteristics, but they still share some of the consequences with bullies and victims (Nansel et al., 2001; Arseneault et al., 2006; Rigby, 2003; Veenstra et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, it seems that bullying participants don't fit in well with the rest of the school population, and this is evident because they all seem to have a negative view on their school environment (Nansel., 2001; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006; Nairn & Smith, 2002; Arseneault et al., 2006). This sad realization might be directly linked to the idea that students involved in bullying have a much greater risk for suicidal ideation (Kim et al., 2005; Bulach et al., 2003). Furthermore, the aggressive nature of bullying also makes

violence an issue in the school system. Beale (2001) noted that bullies are three times more likely to break the law by age 30. It was even noted in Nansel et al. (2004) that in Israel, Republic of Ireland, and the U.S., victims showed 1.98 to 2.27 greater odds of weapon carrying than noninvolved youth. These conclusions can help explain possible reasons why our society has seen an increased rate of extreme forms of violence in American schools in recent years.

The research on the effects of bullying is quite expansive, so it is difficult to fully grasp the consequences in their entirety unless further examination takes place. What should be known though is that school professionals and parents need to make sure they are aware of the problems that students face because of bullying by focusing on the physical, emotional, behavioral, and social cues that our youth express.

Anti-bullying Programs

Ever since bullying was brought to the surface by Olweus' first contributions researchers knew that programs would need to be designed in order to combat the issue of bullying in school environments. The damaging results of bully involvement on the entire school population have made it vital for schools to implement some type of intervention to help prevent situations from occurring. Olweus (1991) displayed the results of the first school-wide program that was ever evaluated by systematic research, and his positive results have been well noted in the literature. The bullying problems reduced by approximately 50%, even 2 years after the original intervention.

Unfortunately, this extremely high percentage of improvement has been difficult to match by more recent anti-bullying plans (Hallford et al., 2006; Newman et al., 2004; Orpinas et al., 2003; Skiba, 2000; Hirschstein et al., 2007).

Each school system has their own distinct characteristics and policies that make each one unique, and it is this reason why anti-bullying programs have not been found to be universally successful (Smith et al., 2004). Practitioners have explained in the literature different ways of assessing and intervening with schools. Programs can be considered targeted, which means their designed to be directed towards just one group of the involved individuals. In contradiction, universal programs target the entire school system, and have the advantage of not leaving anyone out of the equation (Orpinas et al., 2003). Another policy that has been enforced in some schools is zero tolerance, which severely punishes certain offenses, but this method of intervening seems to be more controversial (Skiba, 2000). Curwin & Mendler claim that zero tolerance sends a message that students aren't heard and teacher's judgment in the decision-making process doesn't matter (1997). Zero tolerance doesn't seem to provide any sort of strategies to help combat the issue in a school; rather a whole-school approach can create this type of atmosphere.

Smith et al. conclude that even though there is not a substantial amount of evidence to help promote the efficacy of whole-school based programs there is no evidence that other forms of intervention are more superior with improving bullying issues (2004). These types of preventative programs enforce more conflict resolution. All school professionals can be educated about the reality of bullying and the factors that are associated with it. Their consistent involvement with awareness and intervention is vital for the chances of success with anti-bullying programs (Olweus, 2003). Although, an increase in student involvement might help in the efforts of attaining a healthier school system just as much as the adults that usually lead them (Packman et al., 2005). These

authors expressed that a student driven approach should be considered a viable part of the solution, since: (1) the problem of bullying is experienced directly by students, (2) teachers and students have misunderstandings about the identification of bullying, (3) majority of bullying is subtle (teachers aren't always aware or it goes unreported), (4) group initiative (of students) to intervene could be key, since bystanders are a large reason bullying continues, (5) trust can be created between students and adults with more student involvement (p. 549). This realization about more student participation in bullying programs seems to have a logical component that was even expressed by (Garrett, 2003), and it is an avenue of study that should be studied further.

School systems need to be aware of what the entire process entails when trying to implement and structure an anti-bullying program. Mistakes can be made, and one of the most common made by schools is partial implementation of a program because of time constraints (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). Programs need to be carried out in the way they were designed because any modifications can bring about the possibility of negative or minimal results. Hirschstein et al. noted the importance of teacher implementation because their involvement in a program is very influential on the results (2007). Other studies have also noticed how teachers and schools varied considerably with their implementation of a program (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Monitoring throughout a programs progression, both before and after, is beneficial in order to keep all participators on the same page, as well as attentive to any improvements or changes that need to be made to reach a successful conclusion (Fontanini & Skiba, 2000).

There are hundreds of programs that are designed to prevent violence or other related behavior problems, but not all of them are research based. A U.S. committee of

experts used certain criteria to evaluate these programs and found that only a mere 11 (4 that were school based) satisfied the required criteria (Elliott, 1999, as cited in Olweus, 2003). Furthermore, in a study that examined principal's perceptions and practices regarding bullying prevention, Dake et al. (2004) found that none of the school-based bullying prevention activities were being used by more than 20% of schools even though principals perceived there to be no barriers regarding these activities (p. 372). The principal's perceptions were not accurate compared to the bullying prevalence of previous studies. The right information needs to get to the right people in order for schools to start taking an initiative. In 2004, only 15 states in the U.S. had legislation regarding the topic (Dake et al., 2004), but none of them provide a definition of bullying that includes all components of Olweus' definition (Furlong et al., 2003).

Actions seem to be taking place, but there still seems to be some problems with figuring out how to meet the needs of youth to help prevent and intervene effectively with school bullying. Concluding, a universal problem of bullying is apparent, but the factors that are associated with bullying fluctuate between nations, so interventions should be tailored to meet the individual needs of that specific school system.

Perceptions about Bullying

Since bullying is a complex subject it shouldn't come as a surprise that all the individuals involved with bullying can perceive it differently. Students and teachers are at each end of the spectrum, which is the main reason why these two sides can create their own conceptions about the realities of bullying.

Dake et al. (2003) reported, in a national random sample of U.S. teachers, that less than one in five teachers said bullying was not a problem in their classroom (they

actually considered it a serious problem), but less than 1/3 of these teachers received violence/bullying prevention training. These numbers should be quite alarming, and there is no question improvement with training needs to be made in order to help teachers and other school professionals intervene efficiently. The teachers in this study did not perceive any barriers too great for implementing certain activities, but the authors came up with some possible reasons why implementation might not occur: (1) teachers may not want to devote class time to incorporate activities that are thought to be only a little effective, and (2) a lack of training regarding effective classroom bullying measures was expressed by a majority of teachers. Findings like these were first seen on a large scale by Boulton (1997) when nearly all of the teachers in his study (98.6%) felt a responsibility to prevent bullying in the classroom, but they lacked confidence in their ability to help the problem. As a result, 87% of the teachers desired more prevention training. This previous research was enlightening to the topic, but it was still expressed that even beliefs and concerns about bullying may not generalize from one group of pupils to another (Boulton, Bucci, & Hawker, 1999).

In a large study of about 15,000 students & 1,500 staff, Bradshaw et al. (2007) concluded that in each level of school (e.g. elementary, middle, & high) the staff underestimated the amount of students engaged in 'frequent' bullying. These results were found when nearly the same percentage of students and staff reported being concerned about bullying at their school. This realization should make school systems more aware that effective communication strategies are needed between students and staff to help solve a bullying problem. "Their findings also highlight the need to address staff members' personal experiences with and attitudes toward bullying, as these

experiences appear to play an important role in predicting their likelihood of intervening in bullying situations (p. 380).” These findings can help future anti-bullying programs address these issues so interventions become more reliable.

Do teachers intervene as much as they should considering that they have a tendency to underestimate the amount of bullying that occurs? Newman & Murray (2005) stated that teachers think they typically intervene bullying scenarios more than they actually do; this was highlighted very well by Pepler et al. (1994) when they found that 84% of teachers believed they intervened ‘always’ or ‘often’ in bullying incidents, whereas just 35% of the students reported that teachers intervened. This is quite a drastic discrepancy between these two groups, but researchers have begun to realize why. First and foremost, friends are by far the people most likely told about the bullying, maybe because they have a more personal understanding of the situation (Rigby & Barnes, 2002). Another reason students tend to report bullying to friends rather than school professionals is that many students believe teachers make the situation worse when they intervene (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003; Nairn & Smith, 2002). To contest this issue training programs and seminars dealing with bullying need to educate teachers on the realities of bullying, and how to intervene effectively. This would help because it has been acknowledged that teachers with a greater sense of self-efficacy will be more likely to intervene and help the problem (Bradshaw et al. 2007; Yoon, 2004). Strategies to help solve this issue are important, but school professionals might always have a difficult time realizing how prevalent bullying is at their school because much of it takes place when adults are not present. Stockdale et al. (2002) express this belief by claiming that parents and teachers can understand bullying better than students, but they are not as aware as

students to the amount of bullying that transpires. Although, Brown et al. (2005) declare that adults must be aware that bullying is a very complex behavior and that young adolescents may not possess the insight needed to fully address the problem.

A specific type of bullying behavior seems to be one of the biggest contributors to why teachers and school staff are underestimating prevalence rates. Non-physical forms of bullying can be more covert, brief and harder to notice (Craig et al., 2002). This social or relational form of bullying has been noted to appear in youth during their transition between childhood and adolescence (Craig & Pepler, 2003). So in addition to underreporting, this type of behavior can be directly related to some misconceptions teachers have about bullying. This is noted well by Bauman & Del Rio (2006) when they sampled 82 preservice teachers using descriptive vignettes about different forms of bullying scenarios (e.g. physical, verbal, relational). These soon-to-be teachers considered relational bullying to be less serious than other forms of bullying. They also had less empathy for victims of relational bullying, were less likely to intervene, and would take less severe actions toward relational bullies/victims than those involved in physical or verbal bullying. Nishina (2004) explains how schools tend to have different responses depending on the type of bullying behavior. Instead, a consistent disciplinary approach for all types of bullying that is followed by all school professionals should be pursued. Bauman et al. (2006) came up with possible reasons for their findings: (1) there is more clarity with physical bullying and schools usually have zero tolerance for it, (2) administrators might think a teacher has poor classroom control if they report relational forms of bullying, and (3) the harm (to the victim) is not directly observable, so it relies on subjective judgments of the observers (p.226). The difficulties with identifying and

understanding relational bullying is not good for schools because inconsistent feedback from teachers regarding this type of bullying can lead students to think social exclusion is tolerated and even sometimes permitted (Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

The research is limited, but is gaining ground when examining perceptions of preservice school professionals. Nicolaides et al. (2002) describe how trainees clearly see their role as important with helping the issue of bullying. These authors claim that it is up to teachers to have a leading role in order to stay informed and confident about dealing with it. Societies all across the world are realizing how much of a negative impact bullying can have on a school environment. It is up to researchers and teacher training programs to focus on the issues that are not understood as well. Educating our future school professionals about the common misconceptions will help them become more aware and sensitive to certain issues within their school. It is this direction and purpose that I am pursuing here with my own research. Providing the proper skills and addressing the most difficult issues in training programs and seminars will help our future educators effectively battle the serious issue of bullying.

In a dissertation written by Stankiewicz (2007), she found very similar findings to Bauman & Del Rio in 2006, but also extended their research by finding the same results with other school professionals, not just teachers. She studied a sample of 188 graduate students that were going to be future teachers, administrators, and counselors. It is this dissertation that I will be replicating, and to extend her research limitation I will be changing the participant population so it consists of undergraduate education majors only.

Summary of Literature Review

The topic of bullying is international in scope, and there seems to be plenty of consistent evidence of its negative effects on the participants involved; no individuals or schools seem to be resistant to its existence. Perceptions on the topic vary, but with continued focus on prevention and intervention strategies hopefully bullying will begin to be better understood by students, parents, and school professionals. Society as a whole needs to take more responsibility by enforcing public health action to help contest the bullying epidemic.

Chapter 3 – Design

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions soon-to-be school professionals have on the topic of bullying. There has been limited research done on undergraduates that are in training to become school professionals, so this is where I focused, particularly with education majors that were preferably juniors or seniors. I attempted to extend the research of a dissertation that focused on graduate students. I used the same measures of Stankiewicz's (2007) study, and compared the undergraduate's analyses of the present study to the previous examination of graduate students. In this section I discuss various aspects of the study to make it clear what my intentions and methods included.

Participants

The volunteers for my study were all from a medium-sized university from the northeast. For the purpose of my study, the participants all had to be undergraduates that were education majors. A total of 187 students were able to contribute their time and efforts, but only 144 of the participant's questionnaires were used. Classes have a range of students in them, so some individuals took the survey that did not meet the requirements (student could only be junior or senior education majors). These grade levels were chosen because these students would have had the most opportunities to learn and/or hear about bullying before they graduate and begin working in a school system.

The group of participants was represented mainly by 105 females (73%), while 39 males (27%) nearly made up a third of the population. The two grade levels I focused on,

juniors and seniors, consisted of 58 (40%) and 86 (60%) students respectively. The majority of the undergraduate education majors (95%) were hoping to become teachers, but the remaining 5% were either undecided or were aspiring to be another type of school professional. Also, the bulk of the sample was hoping to eventually work in elementary schools (n= 76, 53%). The rest of the participants were either undecided (n= 32, 22%) on where they wanted to end up working, or they wanted to be in a high school (n=28, 19%) or middle school (n=8, 6%). All of the undergraduate education majors that made up my study were all currently enrolled students in the same university. Please see Figures 3.1-3.4 for actual chart representations of the demographic statistics explained above.

Figure 3.1 - Participant's sex



Figure 3.2 - Participant's class level

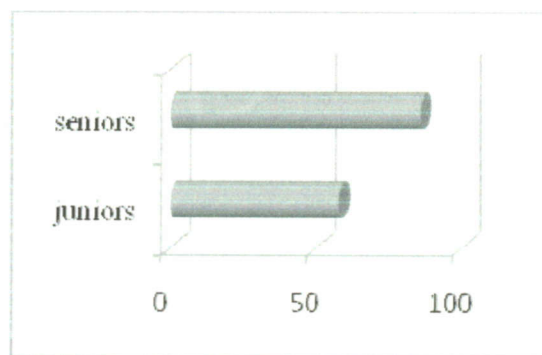


Figure 3.3 - Participant's prospective job

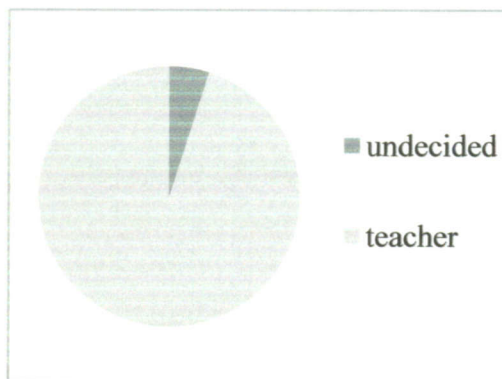
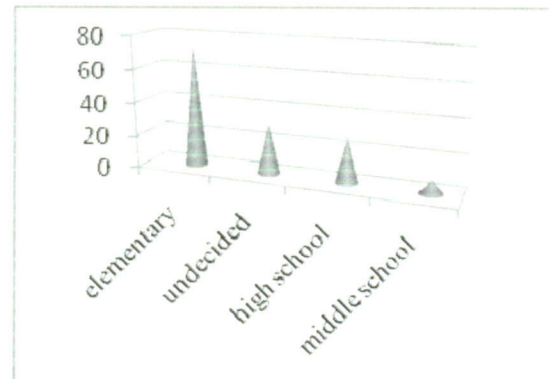


Figure 3.4 - Participant's desired work level



Instruments

This study used 3 self-report measures during the procedure. First, a demographic questionnaire was used which included gender, grade level, desired job type and prospective place of work. I designed this questionnaire myself to focus on certain characteristics that pertained to the purpose of my study. The second and third measures used, assessed the participants' attitudes and perceptions of bullying (Boulton and Jones Questionnaire, Boulton, 1997), and their responses and feelings toward hypothetical, bullying scenarios (Bully Attitudes Questionnaire, Craig et al., 2000). I used modified versions of these two testing measures that were shorter, but consisted of some added questions.

The tailored version of the Boulton and Jones Questionnaire I used is the identical testing measure that Stankiewicz (2007) used in her dissertation, which centered on school professional trainees' perceptions of bullying. Twenty-eight of the original 40 questions were used from the Boulton and Jones Questionnaire, omitting only the questions that had low face validity and low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha below .3). Stankiewicz added two questions to this measure that focused on the participant's perceptions about their own level of training (2007). The 30 items used were all measured on a 5-point, likert scale between a continuum of *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*. This self-report measure was designed to determine: (1) definitions of bullying, (2) attitudes/feelings toward bullying, bullies, and victims, (3) feelings of responsibility for prevention, and (5) perceptions about training. Preliminary analyses were executed by Stankiewicz (2007) to re-evaluate internal consistencies for the following subscales: definition of bullying (.93), attitudes toward bullying (.54), attitudes

toward bullies (.40), attitudes toward victims (.43), feelings of responsibility for prevention (.69), and perceptions of training (.72) (p. 60).

The second measure, the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire, was used to assess participants' responses and feelings toward hypothetical, bullying scenarios (Craig et al., 2000). The original measure consisted of 18 vignettes that were created in agreement with the construct of bullying as defined by Olweus (1991). Each description displayed (1) a negative act of aggression that (2) has been repeated over time, and also (3) involves an imbalance of power. More specifically, three different types of bullying were expressed (e. g., physical, verbal, social exclusion) in different hypothetical scenarios that were either witnessed or not witnessed. The original questionnaire consisted of three questions that assessed participants on: (1) how seriously they perceive the presented conflict, (2) their likelihood of intervention, and (3) if they would call this scenario bullying. Additionally, Stankiewicz (2007) added 4 questions that I have also used to conduct my research. These questions dealt with the topic of intervention in each of the scenarios that are depicted. It should also be noted that Stankiewicz only used 9 vignettes (3 for each type) that only expressed scenarios where witnessing of the act occurred; many other studies have also chosen to only use witnessed situations for their research with the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Yoon, 2004; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Furthermore, the present study chose to use 6 vignettes with an equal amount of physical, verbal, and relational bullying circumstances. These vignettes were presented in counterbalanced order during assessment to limit possible order effects.

For this questionnaire internal consistencies were also re-evaluated by Stankiewicz (2007) during preliminary analyses, which consisted of: perceived

seriousness (.79), likelihood of intended intervention (.79), identification/label of bullying (.68), feelings of responsibility to intervene (.84), predicted effectiveness of intervention (.88) (p.64). The questions in this questionnaire consisted of four 5-point likert scales, one Yes/No, and two that asked participants to check all that apply to the choices that were given.

Correlations were assessed during Stankiewicz's study to examine what items in the measures possibly related to each other. The main relationships that were focused on for correlational analyses included: (1) predicted effectiveness and likelihood of intended intervention, and (2) perceptions of training and likelihood of intended intervention. These two preliminary hypotheses were assessed, and findings showed that the first relationship was significantly positively correlated ($r = .50$) while the second relationship was not significantly correlated ($r = .10$). In other words, Stankiewicz's findings expressed that "the more effective participants predicted their interventions would be the more likely they were to intervene" (p. 86). Also, the participant's perceptions of their level of training were not significantly linked with their likelihood of intended intervention.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to focus on the perceptions and feelings undergraduate students have on the topic of bullying. The two measures that were utilized were designed and tailored for individuals to express their opinions and responses to certain issues that depict the issue of bullying. This study used replicated measures, which were administered by Stankiewicz in a previous dissertation, in an attempt to extend her research by comparing her findings with graduate students (enrolled in

teaching, counseling, or administrative programs) to this study's results from undergraduate education majors. Stankiewicz noted that the previous experience her participants already had in schools could be considered a limitation. Stankiewicz (2007) expressed that "future research is needed to compare school professional trainees who are new to the field with graduate trainees who are working professionals to determine whether findings from the present study were unique to employed school personnel seeking continuing graduate training" (p. 144). The present study hoped to provide answers that will give feedback or clarity to this line of research.

Procedure

A mass email was sent to the entire staff of an educational department, who was employed by a medium-sized university from the northeast, to see if anyone was willing and able to provide assistance. Only professors that taught undergraduate education majors (preferably juniors or seniors) were going to be eligible to offer their students for help. Surveys were administered two ways: (1) the researcher administered questionnaires to the participants during actual class time (10-20 minutes) (94%) or (2) surveys were presented by the student's actual professor and all materials were then received by the researcher immediately (6%). A signed consent form was not needed because the participants were to remain anonymous. Information about the study and the researcher's contact information were provided on a cover sheet attached to the three self-report measures. The demographic questionnaire was shown first in all of the packets, but the other two measures were presented in counterbalanced order to reduce potential order effects. Collection of all materials for each group of students was done in a timely matter. Only the researcher and advisors to the researcher had privileges to look

at the completed questionnaires. All data was computed into SPSS and all analyses were configured using this program. All of the completed data will remain in the possession of only the researcher for the next three years.

Chapter 4 - Analysis

Introduction

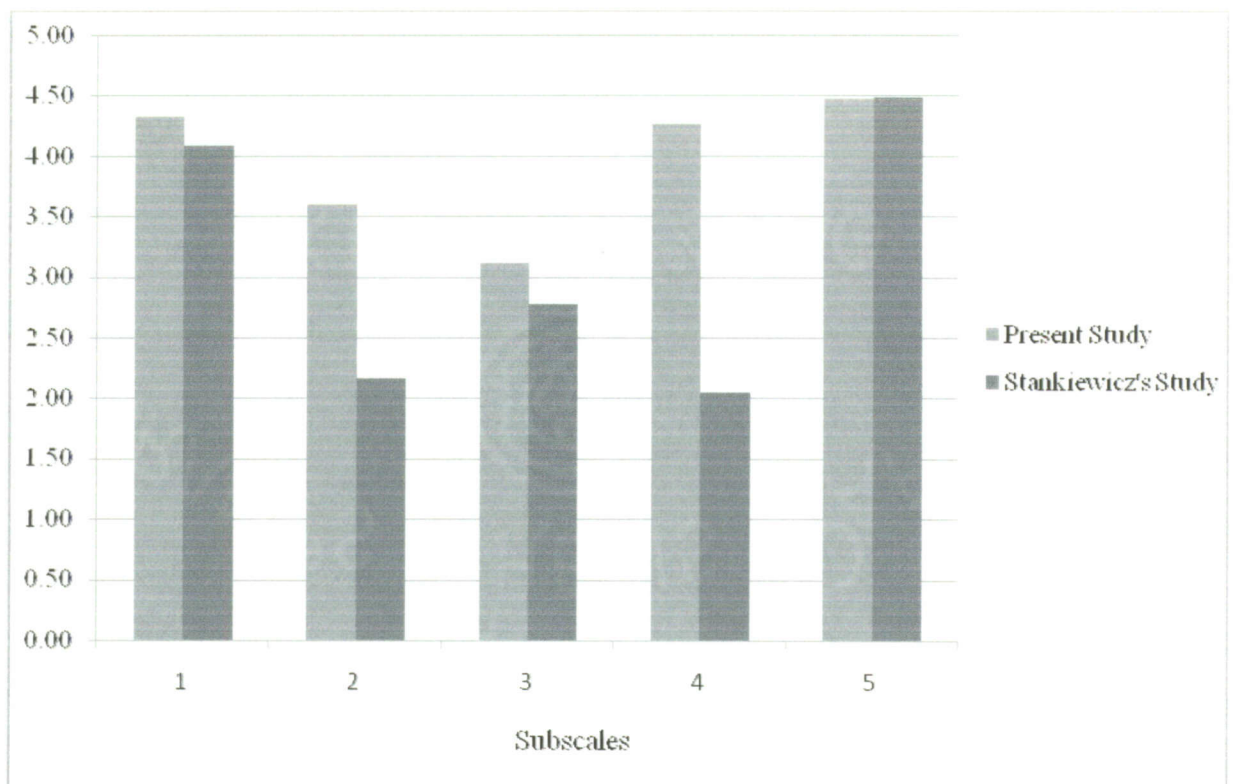
Examining the perceptions of future school professionals on the realities of bullying has seen limited research, so it was this study's intention to contribute to this line of investigation. The researcher focused on the ideas undergraduate, education majors had on the topic of bullying. Results were achieved through data collection and SPSS analyses. The findings of this study were compared to Stankiewicz (2007) dissertation to see if any implications could be made or feedback could be provided. Furthermore, I will also see if the findings of this study supported and/or contradicted the past research on this topic.

Results

The Boulton & Jones Questionnaire was used to analyze the beliefs participants had about bullying. The questionnaire was broken down into seven subscales, and the means recorded were as followed: (1) *definition of bullying* (4.32), (2) *attitudes toward bullying* (3.60), (3) *attitudes toward bullies* (3.31), (4) *attitudes toward victims* (4.26), (5) *feelings of responsibility for prevention* (4.47), and *perceptions about* (6) *future* (4.38) and (7) *past* (2.16) *training*. These subscales can be explained by understanding that higher scores for subscale (1) indicate stronger levels of agreement with the definition of bullying, higher scores for subscale (2) show a more positive attitude toward bullying, higher scores for subscale (3) express more positive attitudes toward bullies, higher scores for subscale (4) indicate less positive attitudes towards victims, higher scores for subscale (5) show greater feelings of responsibility for prevention, higher scores for

subscale (6) express a greater need for more training, and higher scores for subscale (7) indicate a higher satisfaction with the training they have already received. Every single subscale had average total scores range from 1 to 5. These means are compared with the means found in Stankiewicz study in Figure 4.1. It should be noted that only the first 5 subscales are compared because of possible differences between the two studies in regards to the final subscale on the perceptions of training.

Figure 4.1 - Mean comparisons for the Boulton & Jones Questionnaire



It can be noticed that 3 out of 5 of the means are quite similar, but some big differences were seen in subscales 2 and 4. Reasons why there were some large discrepancies is unknown, but more importantly it should be noted that both graduate and undergraduate students were consistent with their agreement towards the definition of bullying and their feelings of responsibility towards prevention. These consistencies

express an understanding that school professionals and preservice employees are aware of what constitutes bullying, and they feel prevention depends largely on their own influence. The findings from this questionnaire help explain the participant's attitudes and perceptions on the realities of bullying.

The analysis of the Bully Attitudes Questionnaires helped figure out the responses for each type of bullying that was depicted: relational, physical and verbal. Each form of bullying was portrayed twice, with a total of six scenarios used all together. Only the first five questions were focused on during the analyses, so each type of bullying produced five mean scores. First, the two relational acts of bullying had averaged means of: (1) *perceived seriousness* (3.33), (2) *likelihood of intended intervention* (3.88), (3) *identification/label as bullying* (0.78), (4) *feelings of responsibility to intervene* (3.69), (5) *predicted effectiveness of intervention* (3.56). Second, the two physical bullying vignettes had averaged means of: (1) *perceived seriousness* (4.61), (2) *likelihood of intended intervention* (4.77), (3) *identification/label as bullying* (0.99), (4) *feelings of responsibility to intervene* (4.62), (5) *predicted effectiveness of intervention* (4.10). Finally, the two verbal bullying portrayals had averaged means of: (1) *perceived seriousness* (4.19), (2) *likelihood of intended intervention* (4.42), (3) *identification/label as bullying* (0.97), (4) *feelings of responsibility to intervene* (4.26), (5) *predicted effectiveness of intervention* (3.84). All of these means have average total scores ranging from 1 to 5 except for question 3, which is a yes or no question asking, "Would you call this bullying?". For question 3, the average total scores ranged from 0 to 1. Higher scores for each question specifically indicate a high degree of seriousness for that specific conflict, a greater chance they would intervene in that precise situation, the more

responsible they felt about intervening in that particular circumstance, and a greater effectiveness in handling that exact situation for questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 respectively.

These means were compared to the results of Stankiewicz’s study to see if any similarities or assumptions could be made. It should be noted that each study could have used different possible vignettes so direct comparisons were not achievable. The results of each can still be matched up to a certain degree because each researcher used scenarios that contained (1) a negative behavior (2) which involves an imbalance of power, and (3) has been repeated over time. These characteristics help each scenario achieve consistency with the construct and definition of bullying. Therefore, even though specific situations might have been different, the overall description of each bullying act was consistent between each study. Look at Table 4.1 for the comparisons of these means between the present study and Stankiewicz’s study.

Table 4.1. Mean comparisons for the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire

Variables	Relational	Physical	Verbal
	P.S. / S.S.	P.S. / S.S.	P.S. / S.S.
Perceived seriousness	3.33 / 3.93	4.61 / 4.60	4.19 / 4.33
Likelihood of intended intervention	3.88 / 3.99	4.77 / 4.73	4.42 / 4.57
Identification/label as bullying	0.78 / 0.62	0.99 / 0.92	0.97 / 0.94
Feelings of responsibility to intervene	3.69 / 3.87	4.62 / 4.63	4.26 / 4.46
Predicted effectiveness of intervention	3.56 / 3.93	4.10 / 4.35	3.84 / 4.42

**P.S. = Present study / S.S. = Stankiewicz’s study

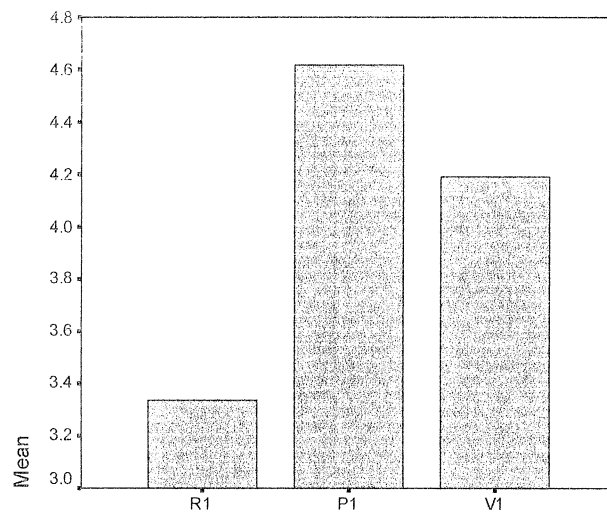
**The present study only used 2 examples for each type of bullying scenario (total of 6), while Stankiewicz’s study used 3 examples for each different bullying vignette (total of 9).

The trends, generally speaking, overall look pretty similar between each study. Graduate and undergraduate students that participated in these two studies seemed to have similar feelings for each form of bullying. Physical bullying seems to be the form of bullying that participants respond the most serious too, with verbal scenarios close behind and finally relational descriptions last. One comparison I thought was interesting was how graduate students, for all three forms of bullying, predicted a higher degree of effectiveness for intervening than undergraduate students did. One assumption I conclude is that the more experience graduate students have in schools possibly gave them more confidence with their intervention efforts. Undergraduate students have not had the opportunity to gain much real world experience which might be part of the reason they do not express very high confidence with their ability to actually intervene. Upon evaluation of the results of these two studies some associations and disparities can be made, but it should be noted that none of these relationships were analyzed to reach any significant meaning. The purpose of these explanations and comparisons was only to try to see if there were any trends or connections between two different populations that took the same questionnaires. The researcher was only trying to provide helpful feedback to the research Stankiewicz completed.

Further examination of these means in the present study helped explain my hypothesis, and express another significant relationship. My hypothesis claimed that there will be significant differences in how the students interpreted and responded to different bullying scenarios. In particular, participants thought relational forms of bullying are less problematic and they deal with them differently. After the data collection and analyses were completed on SPSS the researcher was able to assess these

relationships, and was able to find conclusions that supported the hypothesis. Each question/variable (from the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire) was looked at individually across all three forms of bullying (within-subject factors), and significance was found in all five comparisons. First, participants viewed the seriousness of relational forms of bullying at a significant rate lower than physical and verbal bullying. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA expressed a value of $F(2, 286) = 324.03, p < .01$ (See Figure 4.2 for a graphical representation). Second, the undergraduates were less likely to intervene in relational depictions of bullying compared to physical and verbal forms. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA expressed a value of $F(2, 286) = 159.21, p < .01$. Third, relational scenarios were less likely to actually be called bullying when compared to physical and verbal scenarios. This significance was seen when a one-way repeated measures ANOVA expressed a value of $F(2, 284) = 40.21, p < .01$. Fourth, participants expressed they felt less responsible to intervene in relational bullying situations when compared to physical and verbal ones. This was concluded when a one-way repeated measures ANOVA expressed a value of $F(2, 286) = 173.87, p < .01$. Lastly, these undergraduate education majors felt they would be least effective in handling relational forms of bullying rather than physical and verbal situations. This significance was also produced by a one-way repeated measures ANOVA that expressed a value of $F(2, 286) = 58.75, p < .01$. These conclusions help support the hypothesis because they explain how the participants viewed, labeled, and responded to relational types of bullying significantly different than the other two more common forms.

Figure 4.2 - Significant one-way repeated measures ANOVA for perceived seriousness of bullying scenario

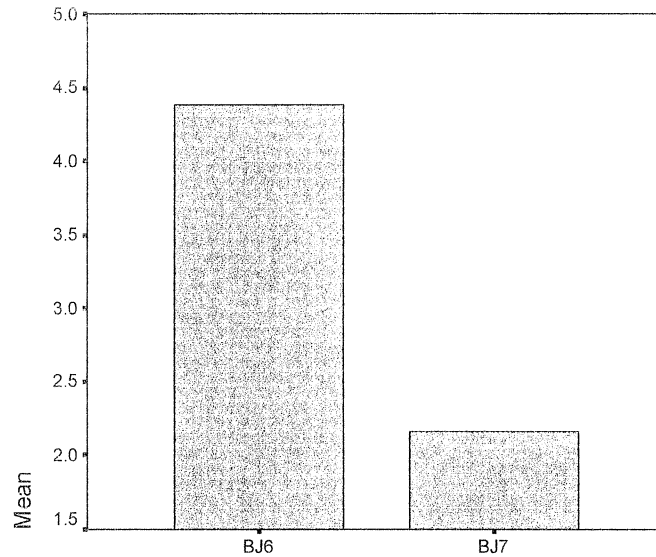


The findings of the present study directly support the research done by Stankiewicz (2007) because she too found lower levels of perceived seriousness, intentions for intervention, feelings of responsibility to intervene, and predicted effectiveness of interventions for incidents of social exclusion (relational bullying) than for physical or verbal bullying scenarios (p.1). Yoon & Kerber (2003) also reported that teachers expressed levels of empathy and involvement that were significantly less for relational bullying than for physical and verbal forms. This examination also used a modified version of six vignettes of the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire. Furthermore, Bauman & Del Rio (2006) extended this research by comparing Yoon & Kerber's teacher population to a population of preservice teachers, and found that the undergraduates also viewed relational bullying as less serious out of all three types. The preservice teacher population produced similar results to this present study, and another fairly strong comparison can be made because each study used six descriptions of a modified version

of the Bully Attitudes Questionnaire. All of these findings help us realize how relational bullying is a difficult type of behavior that teachers and preservice trainees' do not know enough about or at least have a hard time recognizing or knowing when to intervene. It is understood how this non-physical form of bullying behavior can be more hidden, succinct and more difficult to recognize (Craig et al. 2002).

Two subscales in the Boulton & Jones Questionnaire were looked at closely to see if the relationship was noteworthy. A correlation between the participant's perceptions on bullying training was found to be significant. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test produced a significance with a value of $Z = -10.01$, $p < .01$ (See Figure 4.3 for a graphical representation of this data). These two subscales examined how much future training undergraduates still want on bullying, and how adequately they feel their past training has been. The means of these subscales were as followed: *perceptions about future training* (4.38), and *perceptions on the training they've received* (2.16). This discrepancy was quite intriguing to find because it provides evidence about how preservice school professionals feel about the topic of bullying. Overall these individuals feel a strong need to receive more training because they have a sense of how serious and prevalent the problem presently is in schools and within society. Although, they expressed how their educational program did not sufficiently teach them or provide enough knowledge on the issue of bullying. These feelings create a divergence that can lead to a multitude of questions and possible explanations that will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.3 - Significant correlation on the perceptions of bullying training



Summary of Results

The participants in the present study viewed and reacted to relational forms of bullying in significantly different ways when compared to physical and verbal bullying, which helped support the hypothesis. These findings are consistent with past research, and they inform us that knowledge on and understanding about bullying is still not adequately or completely expressed. The original purpose of this study was directed at extending the research of a dissertation by Stankiewicz (2007). Comparing the means across the two populations showed data that were similar on many different levels. These conclusions help support this line of research, and enable us to realize that different populations are producing related outcomes while using the same testing measures. Also, a significant correlation between the participant's perceptions on training has lead the researcher to ask questions in order to stimulate future research.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Introduction

The objective of the present study was to obtain a thorough understanding of the perceptions undergraduate education majors have on the subject of bullying. More specifically, the researcher wanted to assess the opinions, feelings, and knowledge undergraduate students had about bullying. The participants consisted of 144 juniors and seniors from a medium-sized university in the northeast. Two questionnaires were used to help the participants express their beliefs. In the one questionnaire hypothetical situations, or vignettes, were depicted, which helped the researcher focus on three specific types of bullying: relational, physical, and verbal. The findings of the study helped support the hypothesis by showing how the participants thought and reacted to relational bullying significantly different than the other two types. In particular, the undergraduate students had these ideas about relational bullying (when compared to physical and verbal bullying): they rated these conflicts the least serious, they were least likely to intervene, they often didn't recognize it as bullying, they felt least responsible to intervene, and they felt they would be the least effective handling these specific scenarios. Results from this study also concluded that the undergraduates were not satisfied with the level of training they had received about bullying. Findings from this study help support the limited literature, but they also might help facilitate a line of research that will figure out how preservice school professionals can be educated and trained much more effectively on the topic of bullying.

Interpretation of Findings

The researcher had no direct research questions because the attempt of this study was to simply extend upon the findings that were produced by a dissertation by Stankiewicz (2007). A different population was used and focused on, and simple comparisons were made between the means of each study. Similar trends and comparisons were made that can help us understand the ways current school professionals and future school professional think about the issue. The comparisons between these populations can help guide future education and training on the topic of bullying because researchers can get a better understanding of the misconceptions these individuals have. Relational forms of bullying have been difficult for current and future school professionals to understand and intervene with (Yoon & Kerber, 2003; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; & Stankiewicz, 2007), so it makes sense for future educators and trainers to focus on this specific issue. Consistency with how to intervene and a better overall awareness about bullying can help future school professionals because if this does not happen students will continue to think social exclusion is accepted and even sometimes allowable (Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

The findings of the present study even suggest that current undergraduate students desire future training mainly because they do not feel they have received sufficient training thus far. Furthermore, the undergraduate students of this study reported lower scores in their own abilities to effectively handle all three of the types of bullying situations when compared to the graduate students of Stankiewicz's study. Educators and trainers, and possibly even the future school professionals themselves should strive for achieving higher levels of confidence and knowledge in order to be more competent

professionals in this area before they even reach the school systems. Nicolaides et al. (2002) expressed how future school professionals believe in their role as being quite significant in combating the problem of bullying. The participants in the present study also felt strong in their responsibility to intervene, and showed need/want for future training. These opinions show how serious and aware these undergraduate students are about challenging the bullying crisis.

The main finding of this study does not come as a complete shock because the teacher can rely on standard policies and procedures to respond to overt types of bullying (Nishina, 2004). Our school systems are designed to train professionals to recognize and intervene with clear and obvious forms of bullying behavior (physical and verbal). Bauman & Del Rio (2006) explain how the teacher is not faced with uncertainty about the best course of action when it comes to these explicit behaviors (p. 226). What the main finding of this study should help us realize is that educators and trainers need to figure out new ways to help school professionals recognize and understand all types of problematic behaviors.

Limitations

This study was not able to steer clear of possible limitations, and the most notable problem with this study is that the participants were all from one university in a specific geographic location. This characteristic of the study makes it hard for the results to generalize to all different populations and areas. Furthermore, there were only 144 contributors that helped produce the study's results, but this population size is unfortunately not even close to a national or regional sample representation. Also, a method of assessment limits the reliability of the results slightly because responses to

hypothetical scenarios were recorded. This type of measurement falls short of actual observational situations. It is understood that even though the participants answered these questions with honest intent, there is regrettably no way to know if these present actions and thoughts will carry over to a specific, future event.

It should be noted that the participants were not asked what their other major was because students who are education majors also have a subject area they specialize in (e.g. Physical Education, English, etc.). For example, students might take different paths depending on what their specialization is in, so perhaps future Special Education teachers might answer questions differently than future Science teachers. Future research can focus on this variable to see if a specific specialization for future school professionals produces certain opinions and responses on the issue of bullying.

Part of the purpose of this present study was to extend the research of a dissertation, more specifically a different population was being assessed with all the same materials. With that said, a direct comparison between these studies cannot produce any significant similarities or trends because the two researchers were not able to work in direct connection with one another. It is possible that there were some subtle differences between the materials and procedures that were used. So any conclusions and/or associations made by the researcher of this study were only an attempt to provide helpful feedback and gain personal insight, nothing more.

Conclusions

Bullying and violence have been increasing in more extreme ways than ever before. It is vital to address these issues because the security and health of our youth needs to be protected. Community mental health action needs to be the driving force right

now because all of the research can only provide so many answers (Kim, Koh, & Leventhal (2004). Research still contributes so much to society, but a more direct approach needs to be attempted in order to help schools cope with problems such as bullying. Prevention programs are on the rise and a variety of intervention and prevention models have been implemented into schools; unfortunately, they have yet to make a difference that is universal in scale. Knowledge about bullying has increased over the past four decades because of research, but the complexities of the behavior and the situation seem to still be winning the battle. The findings of the present study show that soon-to-be school professionals care about the prevention of bullying, so if that is the case we just need to figure out ways to better address this issue. More radical solutions might be needed in order to bring on necessary change. The undergraduates in this study felt their educational training on the topic of bullying was subpar; hopefully, other educational programs around the country are teaching preservice school professionals the knowledge they need to become skilled graduates in this area. With that said, there is no way in knowing if that is the case, so hopefully future research will be able to focus on this in order to find out how our school professional trainees feel about the training they are receiving in educational programs across the country and internationally.

Future Implications

This study shows that future school professionals (mainly teachers) would like more training on the topic of bullying, and they also felt they were not effectively trained throughout their instructional journey. These findings can help us realize the issues that need to become the center of attention. Efforts to improve education, training, seminars, and workshops on bullying need to be stressed upon in the near future. Times have

changed, and our society is influencing our youth like never before, but we can make it our responsibility to find new ways to help fight the occurring problems in our schools today. Maybe teachers need to be more prepared, and held more responsible in dealing with the social and emotional interactions students have within the school. If so, then educational programs and training seminars need to find ways to improve their methods and techniques. School professionals need to have the experience and confidence to deal with bullying and violence in the schools before they even step foot in them. This high expectation is what we can attempt to achieve so our school professionals become more qualified upon their training and graduation. Perhaps now is when school professionals need to configure new ideas and procedures to help keep our school environments healthier and safer.

Questions will still remain in the future because the complexities of the bullying paradigm seem to persist. Whose job really is it to train and educate school professionals about the world of bullying within schools? Do educational programs have the time to fit bullying training into their curriculum, or do they have more important aspects of instructive preparation to focus on? Should schools be held more accountable in the situation? Maybe school professionals need to start receiving training through seminars and workshops sooner and more often. Maybe schools could start designing programs where new employees go through a training program that is taught by the school counselors and psychologists. There is no doubt that parents can even be a part of the solution and contribute to the educational process, so maybe schools can help them work with their children and teachers in ways that teach and promote pro-social behavior. Radical decisions need to be made because so far nothing seems to be providing the best

answer. Maybe schools could input social and emotional instruction as part of the curriculum. A central purpose to education is producing children that will be competent citizens both academically and socially later in life, so hopefully are school systems are not forgetting the latter part of this concept. Violence and negative behavior within schools needs to be reduced, so hopefully more effective prevention training and possibly changes in school curriculum will help lead our youth into a new direction of pro-social behavior. Communities need to work collaboratively to figure out what techniques would be best utilized for their own individual needs. Educators, parents, schools, and children need to be on the same page in order to win the fight against bullying.

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