



EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS' KNOWLEDGE AND NEEDS REGARDING BULLYING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' and other education professionals' needs and knowledge when dealing with bullying situations. Data collection was carried out in two different sessions of a bullying prevention one-day symposium at a four-year state university. The participants were 53 educational professionals from several elementary and middle schools. Qualitative analysis of session artifacts revealed that participants had a basic understanding of bullying; however, they doubt its definition and how to identify when it occurs. Participants in the case study were interested in being change agents when it comes to addressing bullying problems. However, they lacked self-confidence and access to appropriate resources to overcome their fears and diminished self-efficacy for proper intervention.

1. Introduction

According to the Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017), 20.2% of students had been bullied in the United States and 25.8% in Idaho. In many cases, these incidents of bullying happen unbeknownst to the faculty. A teacher's blindness to a bullying situation may permit undesirable incidents to continue, which exacerbates the effects experienced by the bullied student (Cajigas de Segredo, Khan, Luzardo, Najson, & Zamalvide, 2004).

The current case study analyzes teachers' and school counselors' needs and understandings when dealing with traditional bullying and cyberbullying in Idaho schools, through the Bullying Prevention 101 Institute held by Boise State University. The results are meant to help inform a more extensive study that considers a teacher's preparedness and to create measures needed to improve interventions toward traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

2. Literature Review

Olweus documented many of the first bullying studies in Norway, then expanded to include the European Union and the United States (Cajigas de Segredo et al., 2004). Olweus writes, "A person is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons" (Olweus, 1994, p. 98). This definition separates specific bullying situations from other types of aggression. Thomas, Connor, and Scott (2014) emphasized the three main factors in the bullying from the Olweus (1993) definition, which is intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance.

Olweus (2013) describes some of the nuances those three factors have in bullying, making some clarifications.

- **Intentionality:** the intentionality of the aggressor is known by analyzing the level of understanding of the pain or harm he or she is causing to the victim. If the aggressor understands that he or she is causing negative feelings, it is evident that the intentionality of hurting exists.
- **Repetition:** it is not imperative to consider repetition in a bullying case. He updated the definition, leaving the repetition factor

as a feature of bullying, but not an essential one.

- **Power imbalance:** power imbalance can take several different forms, referring to strength, popularity, number of the group, self-confidence, or others. The power imbalance is best characterized by the victims' feelings of not being able to stop the situation by themselves.

It is in this last factor where Olweus and Smith, del Barrio and Tokunaga (2012) disagree, as Olweus takes the power imbalance from the victim's perspective, whereas Smith et al. take it from the perspective of others. However, diverse definitions have been developed since Olweus' initial description. That lack of consistency has issued a new barrier: "The lack of a uniform definition hinders our ability to understand the true magnitude, scope, and impact of bullying and track trends over time" (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger & Lumpkin 2014, p. 1).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report provides the following bullying definition:

Any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm. (Gladden et al., 2014, p. 7).

This definition is updated, highly specific, and provided within the Bullying Prevention 101 Institute to the participants of this study.

Díaz-Aguado (2006) explained how bullying has adverse consequences for all the parties involved. The victims suffer, are afraid, lose self-confidence, and often internalize the violence, believing that the stronger one will always succeed in life. The aggressor or aggressors lower their level of empathy, and they learn the distorted message that their acts have no consequences and that they can continue using violence in the future (workplace harassment and/or gender violence) with the possibility that they might become criminals in the future. The passive agents, who know the situation but do nothing to prevent it, can experience a lack of solidarity or sensitivity with others, and in some

cases, they can join the aggressor, hoping to avoid becoming a new victim. The environment, including the school environment and society, would affect lack of tolerance, equality, or peaceful feelings. Referring to the agents involved in bullying situations, Díaz Aguado (2006), apart from the victim and the aggressor, defines other five types of roles:

1. The person that does not start the action but participates in the aggression.
2. The one that approves that aggression but does not take part in it.
3. The passive viewer who does not want to be involved in any way.
4. The viewer who does not dare to stop the aggression.
5. The defender of the victim, who gives steps to stop it.

Research is scant regarding teachers' needs and perceptions about their role in traditional bullying and cyberbullying situations (Bradshaw, Waasdrp, O' Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013). Meanwhile, bullying persists as a problem in schools, and it continues to affect a large number of students every year (Díaz-Aguado, 2006; Cajigas de Segredo et al., 2004; Rigby & Johnson, 2016). Victims are often afraid to talk about these situations, as they feel guilty or responsible for the bullying they are experiencing. Due to that fear, it is difficult for students to ask for help (Blaya, Derarbieux, & Lucas Molina, 2007). And even if bullying situations happen at schools, a large percentage of bullying instances are frequently not reported to the faculty, unidentified to school workers. That lack of knowledge of the situation permits the bullying to continue, turning a blind eye to the harmful effects felt by the students involved (Cajigas de Segredo et al., 2004). In the moment of asking for help, victims frequently choose to open up to their friends or peers in school because they feel more confident and closer to them to talk about a bullying situation. Due to this dynamic, teachers are often the last person to ask for help (Rigby & Barnes, 2002). However, even though many students believe that situations involving frequent aggression are problems in which they would not ask for help from teachers, they affirm that they would ask for help from specific teachers that they trust (Díaz-Aguado, 2006).

Additional studies reported that teachers have little confidence in themselves to intervene in abusive situations (Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011; Álvarez-García, Rodríguez, González-Castro, Núñez, & Álvarez, 2010). Some researchers provide recommendations for more training for teachers to improve their response to bullying:

A lack of effective undergraduate teacher training and ongoing training for teachers may contribute to current teacher attitudes. With better training opportunities and clearly articulated whole school policies and intervention programmes for all forms of bullying, covert bullying may be better managed in schools in the future. (Byers et al., 2011, p. 116)

This request for more training highlights a teacher's lack of confidence in themselves when dealing with bullying and cyberbullying situations, even while there are several programs and protocols against bullying available. One such program is the KiVa program (an acronym of "Kiusaamista Vastaa," which in Finnish means, "Against bullying"), produced at the University of Turku in Finland. It is a school-based anti-bullying program that reported reduced bullying in its first year of implementation (Kärnä, Voeten, Little, Poskiparta, Alanen & Salmivalli, 2011). KIVA uses empathy, one of the reported best tools, to make improvements that address teacher training (Gaines, 2016). Another example is the SWPBIS program (School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) used in the United States. The implementation of the SWPBIS program is rapidly becoming more popular in Idaho (with the RK12 BSU project, <https://rk12.boisestate.edu/>).

Bullying training protocols and programs, such as KIVA and SWPBIS, require teacher involvement to be effective (Díaz-Aguado, 2006). Eden, Heiman, and Olenik-Shemesh (2013) found that the confidence of teachers addressing problems of cyberbullying was low, and they conclude that educators should receive more instruction. In Australia, several studies have asserted the necessity for helping teachers to intervene in bullying and cyberbullying situations: "Unfortunately, despite recognition of the importance of anti-bullying measures in schools, reinforced in some educational

jurisdictions by legislation, there is comparatively little training available to help teachers to develop the necessary skills," (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003, p. 544). Lester, Waters, Pearce, Spears, and Falconer (2018) also found that pre-service teachers need to learn more about how to intervene appropriately when a bullying case occurs. Pre-service teachers do not feel their coursework is preparing them for this topic.

3. Methods

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory explains how the degree of efficacy expectations and outcome expectations affect personal efficacy, the behavior when acting to achieve outcomes. "The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). For example, in the case of a teacher who is aware of bullying happening in her or his classroom, their efficacy will determine whether she or he feels confident, able, and with the capacity to solve the situation in a successful way. The outcome expectations will decide if the teacher thinks that performing the needed behavior of acting, or doing something to stop the bullying situation will achieve the desired outcomes. People, or more specifically, teachers will feel insecure about performing a behavior if they do not feel adequately trained and confident. However, they will cope with the problem if they have a high level of efficacy expectations and outcome expectations.

Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives, however, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend, and of how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1977, p. 194).

A qualitative exploratory research design was used to investigate educational professionals' ideas about bullying. The approach considered the hypothesis as part of the research process itself, "whose aim is to develop an adequate theory according to the observations that have been made (exploratory study)" (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008, p. 272). Therefore, this study is seeking to establish a base of the participants' needs and knowledge regarding

bullying to provide a foundation for further research and ultimately to improve teachers' likelihoods of intervention. The data was analyzed through categorization and coding the emerging themes retrieved from the groups' discussions and written poster comments.

The participants of this research were 53 elementary and middle school teachers and counselors in the state of Idaho (17 participants in the first session and 36 in the second). Bullying peaks between 6th and 8th grades, students between the ages of 11 and 13 (Eslea & Rees, 2001). For that reason, this study selected the Bullying Prevention 101 (BP 101) Institute's activity to collect the data from elementary and middle school educational professionals. The BP 101 institute is a one-day, voluntary attendance institute, offered by Boise State University that helps teachers in Idaho discover what bullying is and provides strategies to help prevent this phenomenon. The main goals of this Institute are retrieved from their website <https://www.boisestate.edu/csi-ipbn/bullying-prevention-101>:

- Provide the definition of bullying.
- Provide effective models for preventing bullying.
- Discuss the requirements in House Bill 246 that is related to harassment, intimidation, and bullying (such as, that intentional gestures, in any form, also cyberbullying situations, should be found guilty of an infraction; and that schools need to inform school staff, parents, and students about bullying situations, and they are expected to intervene, by applying consequences, and annually report bullying cases to the State Department of Education.
- Create an Action Plan to fulfill those requirements

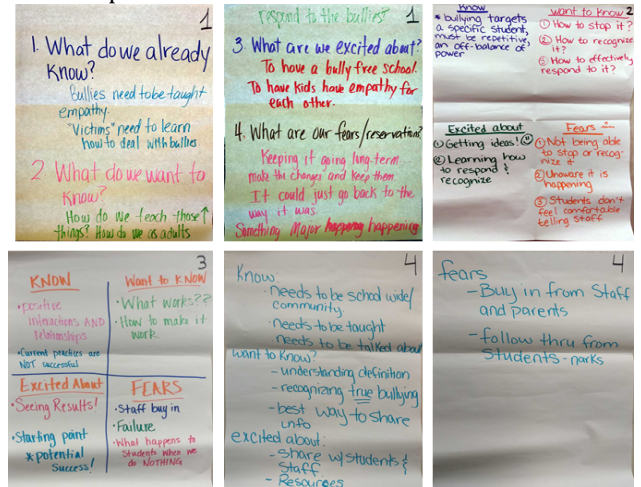
Because the activity in which the educational professionals participated was already part of the BP 101 Institute, and with the aim of not making participants uncomfortable and not interfering in the fluency of the class, this study did not collect any demographic data from the participants. The instrument used in this study were the questions proposed by the BP 101 Institute for that activity: "Regarding bullying prevention, what do you know? What do you want to know? What are you excited about?"

What are your fears?" The data collection was carried out in two different sessions of this BP 101 Institute (November 8th, 2018, and February 7th, 2019). Participants, with the help of instructors, answered questions for the activity in groups (5 groups in the first session and 11 groups in the second session).

Each group was given a poster paper in which they could answer the four questions mentioned above after discussing them as a group. Afterward, one participant per group presented their poster and explained their answers to the rest of the participants and instructors. The posters were collected after the activity was concluded (see Figure 1). Data were analyzed through categorizing the participants' answers to the four questions in the posters, grouping the comments that have common themes, and adding new categories when new ideas emerged.

any demographic information or asked any personal question.

Figure 1. Example artifacts from the bullying workshop.



4. Ethical considerations

This study was reviewed by IRB, which approved the SB-IRB Notification of Exemption - 101-SB18-217. This study did not collect data from any vulnerable population and did not collect

5. Results

The themes were coded in the following manner: K themes for the KNOW question, W themes for WANT TO KNOW question, E themes for EXCITED ABOUT question and F themes for FEARS question, specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Coded responses of educators regarding bullying / cyberbullying (with the frequency of each in parenthesis)

What do you know about bullying?	What do you want to know about bullying?	What are you excited about?	Which are your fears/reservations about bullying?
K1- Teach proactive behaviors school-wide (16)	W1- What is "bullying" (7)	E1- Training to learn strategies and resources for prevention and intervention (13)	F1- Lack of self-confidence of improving the situation (7)
K2- Difficult to define and identify bullying (9)	W2- How to empower students/parents/ bystanders to report and intervene (2)	E2- Seeing a change in school culture (6)	F2- Teacher buy-in/not commitment (5)
K3- Can happen to anyone/any way (2)	W3- Training: strategies and appropriate curriculum to change behaviors (17)	E3- How to recognize it (1)	F3- How to make it systematic (2)
K4- Seem to be increasing (2)	W4- More information on cyberbullying (1)	E4- Share the learned information (5)	F4- The use of "bullying" word loosely (2)
K5- Repetitive and imbalance of power (1)	W5- How to prevent (3)		F5- Not easy to recognize (2)
K6- Bystanders for preventing the bullying (3)	W6- How to educate to understand what bullying is (7)		F6- Students not comfortable telling staff (1)
K7- Document the problem (1)			F7- Not knowing enough (2)
			F8- Facing parents (2)
			F9- Cyberbullying (3)

The top-level categories were the following (according to the frequency of the comments in each category):

- What do you know about bullying?

For this question, the most relevant categories were K1, K2, and K6. Education professionals knew that school-wide positive culture and relationships are a vital factor in reducing or stopping the bullying problem. Participants recognized that they do not know what bullying is precisely, and they did not know how to identify it accurately. However, they knew that bystanders could help to stop or reduce the impact of bullying situations.

- What do you want to know about bullying?

In this case, the most frequent and, thus, the most relevant answers fell into categories W1, W3, and W6. Overall, the teacher participants knew they needed useful and appropriate training, tools, and resources to face bullying problems. They wanted to understand what bullying is and how to identify it. Further, they wanted to know how to educate students, parents, and the rest of the staff on this topic.

- What are you excited about?

For this question, most responses fell into category E1; participants were excited about obtaining strategies and resources to prevent and intervene in bullying. They spoke about needing ideas to solve the problem. Responses that fell into categories E2 and E4 were the next two most prevalent categories, that is, the participants were looking forward to seeing a change to improve the school culture and to leverage new information regarding bullying interventions and prevention.

- What are your fears/reservations about bullying?

This question probes how teachers and education professionals feel about bullying and cyberbullying. The main categories for responses fell into F1, F2, and F9. Participants expressed a lack of confidence and a fear that no matter what they try to do, the negative will always overpower the positive. There was also a concern about the commitment of their coworker teachers, wondering if all teachers would care about bullying situations. Cyberbullying is a topic they are especially worried about, and they expressed it as being

challenging to address. They did not know how to intervene nor prevent cyberbullying, and they expressed a need for more training on it.

6. Limitations

A primary limitation of the results is the lack of demographic data of the participants. While there were both teachers and counsellors participating in the Bullying Prevention 101 Institute, they were not separated into groups. We cannot draw differences between skills and experiences that different professions carried nor how that may have affected their answers. A second limitation is the sample size. The participants in this study only included 53 education professionals, and therefore the results of this study have the same limits for generalization as with other case studies.

7. Conclusion

Bullying problems can cause several negative consequences for a student's mental and educational development (Nixon, 2014). Teachers' failures to intervene in bullying cases can cause the situation to continue and increase future bullying problems (Yoon, 2004). However, teachers do not feel confident nor prepared enough to appropriately intervene in a traditional bullying or a cyberbullying situation (Eden et al., 2013; Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003; Lester et al., 2018). Several relevant concerns were expressed by teachers about the proliferation of bullying and cyberbullying instances examined in the current study. They were aware of some information about bullying, even if some teachers expressed confusion or ambiguity about its persistence and prevention. The most relevant finding of this study is that school professionals expressed the need for training and obtaining appropriate and trustworthy resources. If provided with training and support, they could conceivably dismiss their expressed lack of confidence when acting and reacting against bullying and cyberbullying situations.

These conclusions are consistent with many ideas expressed in recent bullying literature (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2013; Eden et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2018) that found that teachers lack confidence in handling bullying and

cyberbullying situations and expressed the desire to receive more training. In this case, regional educational professionals had similar feelings regarding training. Forthcoming research efforts aim to identify the critical competencies for training teachers to encourage their likelihood of intervention in bullying or cyberbullying situations.

8. Next study

In this study, we analyzed the needs of elementary and middle school professionals in

order to help build effective and appropriate teacher training. For future studies, it would be beneficial to look at students who exemplify a willingness to address bullying and cyberbullying instances with their teachers, and the corresponding teacher responses and attitudes. That way, we could determine what students are expecting of teachers and the characteristics students need from teachers to trust them. There is also a need to gain a better understanding toward teachers' hesitations for intervening.

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