

Adults Role in Bullying

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Abstract Do adults play a role in bullying? Do parents, teachers, school staff, and community adult leaders influence bullying behavior in children and teenagers? This article will focus on research regarding all adults who have almost daily contact with children and teens and their part in how bullying is identified, addressed, and prevented. This article provides a summary of the literature on the adult role in bullying and provides a starting point for future research.

Keywords Adults Role, Educational Research, Bullying

1. Introduction

According to Murray-Harvey and Slee ([1]previous school-related bullying research focused largely on inter-relationships among perpetrators and victims and more recently has included influences on, and by, peers. Still, less attention is given to wider school relationships that consider families and teachers. Crothers and Kolbert [2] concluded society's acceptance of bullying as a means of establishing and securing social position and as a way to cement power differences is one reason why bullying has persisted through history. Waasdorp, Pas, and Bradshaw [3] surmised that although many bullying prevention programs aim to involve multiple partners, few studies have examined perceptual differences regarding peer victimization and the broader bullying climate among students, staff, and parents. The purpose of the study is to provide a summary and starting point for future research on the role of adults in bullying. The literature review of what has been published specially on adult roles 2000-2012.

2. Parents

Since parents are the first adults children have as role models, we will begin looking at the research related to the role of the parent in bullying. Davis and Nixon [4] found the normal expectations from a student's perspective about the role of parents when bullying was discussed. Students reported that things often got worse when adults ignored

what was going on, told them to stop tattling, told them to solve the problem themselves, or told them that if they acted differently this would not be happening to them.

Tyrrell [5] reported DuWayne Gregory Suffolk who is a legislator from Amityville talked with Sophia Chang (Newsday, 2010) about the role technology plays in bullying. Mr. Suffolk concluded "there is the greatest generational gulf existing now between parents and children in terms of parents not understanding the technology the children are using and being intimidated by it, and parents need to realize there is a big difference between a locked diary in a child's night table . . . and something a child is sending to an unbelievable number of people." Kay [6] concluded parents should monitor the child's school and extra-curricular activities, develop relationship with the school's personnel, and identify the child's peers. Moreover, it is also recommended that children should be taught social skills. Kolwalski and Fedina [7] stated parents and children disagreed on a number of issues related to use of the Internet, indicating the need for more clear communication between parents and their children.

Bourke and Burgman [8] found children with disabilities may not want to worry their parents when they believe they are being bullied. This perspective corresponds with Mason's [9] statement that children with disabilities learn to be 'flippant about their own needs as a way of attempting to cheer up their parents.' It is imperative parents become aware of the signs of bullying and respond to those signs appropriately.

3. Teachers

Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage [10] found it is important that teachers do not underestimate the severity of perpetration that is reported or observed. Recognition of verbal and passive bullying will help to reduce further incidents. Students will benefit from social skills education and the development of self-confidence. Another factor is the perception of bullying. A recent study by Newgent et al [11] found that approximately seventy percent of elementary school staff thought that ten percent or less of their students were victims of frequent bullying. In contrast, thirty-three percent of the students reported being victims of frequent bullying.

According to de Moncy, Pihl and Zanberg [12] half the teachers participating in their study have a too positive view on the social position of students who are bullied. These teachers tended to seriously underestimate both the frequency with which students are being bullied and the frequency with which these students actively bully their peers. Crothers and Kolbert [2] found classroom teachers may benefit from perceiving peer victimization among students as a behavior management issue that can be prevented or addressed through authoritative discipline, guidance curricular approaches, and teacher-parent partnerships, among other methods.

According to Hazel's research [13], emergent from the data were the adults' preoccupation with improving results on the state-mandated high-stakes achievement test in contrast to the children's identification of largely unchecked bullying and its negative impact on their school experience and learning. Delfabbro, et al [14] found that victims of teacher victimization were more likely to be rated as less able academically, had less intention to complete school and were more likely to be engaged in high-risk behaviors such as gambling, drug use and under-age drinking. Da Costa and Gil [15] also suggested attending special education classes or requiring extra help from teachers can also cause students to be involved in bullying situations.

Acts of teasing and bullying vary greatly and depend in part on demographic characteristics. Will and Neufeld [16] stated age, sex, and ethnicity make some children more vulnerable than others to be victims of bullying. This provides an even greater reason for teachers to be careful to avoid stereotyping children simply on the basis of their belonging to certain groups because each case of bullying is different.

According to Kaloyirou and Lindsay [17], teachers usually report their difficulties in understanding bullies and their anxiety to find effective ways to deal with them. Bourke and Burgman [8] cited Rigby [18] stating that many of the participants in their study felt teachers were not responding appropriately when bullying was reported. Effective action regarding bullying and responding to bullying must be a combined effort from teachers and students.

As recent as February 2013, Suzanne Tobias from the Wichita Eagle (as printed in the *Anniston Star* February 17, 2013) reported teachers of fifth-graders did not realize the role they might play in causing a student to be bullied. When these teachers were asked about bullying they assumed the reference was to the usual kinds of bullying: playgrounds, hallways, cyberspace, student vs. student. However, these teachers in Wichita, Kansas began to look at how they themselves might actually encourage bullying types of behavior. The main area of focus for these teachers was cultural bullying. They realized as teachers they needed to understand and value diverse backgrounds and cultures of their students. As a result of teachers' responses to these students, other students might be more accepting of the diverse student population.

4. Adults in General

Adults with whom students relate to outside of the home and school can also influence bullying behavior – either positively or negatively. According to Fried and Fried [19] some teasing in childhood is inevitable, and it can be an important preparation for life. However, there is a point when teasing stops being helpful or playful; and it becomes humiliating or emotionally abusive, and when the victim requires protection from the teaser._

Will and Neufeld [16] concluded that when adults or parents accept bullying as an unfortunate stage that some children go through, the potential for bullying to escalate into more-violent acts increases. The other problem which exists with believing the idea that bullying is part of growing up is there are some children who are more likely than other children to be victimized repeatedly and persistently by peers. The perpetrating bullies conclude their behavior is sanctioned and they have a right to treat others the way they are treating them. In addition to this, bullies hear adults make such comments as: "Being bullied is just part of growing up," "You need to stand up for yourself," "Boys will be boys," "You need to toughen up; don't be so sensitive," "They tease you because they like you," or "They're just jealous." These messages, which imply that bullying is something which all students must endure as a part of growing up, come from adults whom the students love and respect, adding validity to the students' perceptions._These messages subtly contribute to making violence a complex, widespread, and deeply rooted behavior in our culture._

When adults don't intervene in circumstances such as these, they send the message that hurtful words, hateful looks, or craftily surreptitious remarks are acceptable as stated by Will and Neufeld [16] Additionally, it is important to consider many kinds of evidence before drawing conclusions. Furthermore, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between normal behavior and adverse behavior that can affect a student's psychological well-being.

5. Prevention

There are many strategies for preventing bullying that adults can utilize when dealing with their children, their students, or children of relatives and neighbors. In this section, we examined strategies for adults to utilize in helping children/students overcome bullying situations. Any program for training adults on their role should encompass these strategies.

1. Foster positive staff-student communication and providing support to targets of bullying [20].
2. Work in partnerships to overcome bullying [19]
3. Be willing to listen and give advice [4].
4. Express what the other person did was wrong [4].
5. Check in with your child/student to let them know you are watching to provide support. [4].
6. Talk through situations with your child/student to help

them draw their own conclusions [4].

7. Do not ignore what is happening to your child/student telling them to stop tattling, solve their own problems, or make them feel as if they are acting in a way to invite bullying [4].
8. Encourage your child/student to confide in you [21].
9. Help your child to appear more confident and well groomed [21].
10. Ask your child to repeat/reenact previous incidences of bullying and brainstorm with your child acceptable responses [21].
11. Talk to children about what they do at school and online and keep tabs on their computer work [21].
12. Keep the computer in a high-traffic area. Limit a child's access to cell phones and computers. In most cases, any student in elementary school is too young [21].
13. Ensure your children are not putting personal information like addresses, phone numbers and birthdates online and avoid using provocative screen names [21].
14. Talk to teachers and school staff if it seems your child is a bully or being bullied [21].

5.1. Teachers Underestimate Bullying

Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage [10] stated it is important that teachers do not underestimate the severity of perpetration that is reported or observed. Recognition of verbal and passive bullying will help to reduce further incidents. Students will benefit from social skills education and the development of self confidence. Proactive school intervention programs can assist in building student confidence, and reducing the occurrence of bullying behaviors. Schools will benefit from utilizing multiple resources to confront the issue. Mental health professionals may assist in teaching conflict resolution and dealing with issues the general classroom teacher is not prepared to handle or respond to appropriately. Glasgow and Whitney [23] published *What Successful Schools Do to Involve Families: 55 Partnership Strategies* to help educators bridge the gap between school and home by providing: (1) solidly researched strategies with relevant how-to applications, tips, precautions, and additional resources; (2) strategies for reaching out to nonmainstream or nontraditional families; (3) a chapter on the role of nonparental caregivers; and (4) proven methods for including families in discussions about homework, literacy, mathematics, and students with special needs.

Waasdorp, et al [3] concluded that although many bullying prevention programs aim to involve multiple partners, few studies have examined perceptual differences regarding peer victimization and the broader bullying climate among students, staff, and parents.

5.2. A Remedy for Underestimation

Specifically, teachers can do the following:

1. Be an informed consumer of antibullying curriculums. Anti-bullying interventions can be successful, but there are significant caveats. "Some bullies would benefit from services that go beyond bullying-reduction programs. Some programs work well in Europe, but not as well in the United States. Most antibullying programs have not been rigorously evaluated, so be an informed consumer when investigating claims of success. Even with a well-developed anti-bullying curriculum, understanding students' relationships at your school is crucial [22].
2. "Remember that bullying is also a problem of values. Implement an intellectually challenging character education or socio-emotional learning curriculum. Teach students how to achieve their goals by being assertive rather than aggressive. Always resolve conflicts with civility among and between staff and students. Involve families." [22]
3. "Ask students about bullying. Survey students regularly on whether they are being harassed or have witnessed harassment. Make it easier for students to come to an adult in the school to talk about harassment by building staff-student relationships, having suggestion boxes where students can provide input anonymously, or administering school-wide surveys in which students can report confidentially on peers who bully and on the children whom they harass. Consider what bullying accomplishes for a bully. Does the bully want to gain status? Does the bully use aggression to control others?" [22]
4. "Ask students about their relationships. Bullying is a destructive, asymmetric relationship. Know whom students hang out with, who their friends are, and whom they dislike. Know whom students perceive to be popular and unpopular. Connect with students who have no friends. School staff members vary widely in their knowledge of students' relationships and tend to underestimate the level of aggression among peers." [22]
5. "Build democratic classroom and school climates. Identify student leaders who can encourage peers to stand against bullying. Assess whether student social norms are really against bullying. Train teachers to better understand and manage student social dynamics and handle aggression with clear, consistent consequences. Master teachers not only promote academic success, but also build relationships, trust, and a sense of community." [22]

6. Conclusion

Without adult leadership and actions required to enforce any anti-bullying prevention/intervention program bullying will continue. Bullying is not self-regulating, it must have adult buy-in and emphasis.

Adults are the foundation of stopping bullying. Adults are the bed rock of bully prevention/intervention. They are instrumental in writing the program, training, enforcing the program and reinforcing the positive attitudes of the students

toward bullying.

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