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Bullying at the Middle School Level: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Bullying within schools has been a topic of great interest in recent years. Due to various factors, bullying is a particularly large problem at middle schools. In order to obtain further research on this topic, a study was conducted at a small suburban middle school in Connecticut. Teachers were given surveys to complete to address their thoughts on bullying. Additionally, a smaller subsample of teachers and the school social worker were interviewed. The data gathered from the surveys and interviews revealed that bullying was in fact present at the school. Participants expressed that students tend to bully one another in more indirect rather than direct ways, making it difficult for staff to notice when bullying is taking place. Being aware of this theme can help teachers and social workers at others schools learn how to better identify bullying behaviors and address them in more effective ways. On a higher level, this study has implications for policy and social work practice; legislators can work to create more uniform policies regarding bullying and social workers can gain a better understanding of how to effectively work with adolescents who are involved with bullying.

Bullying at the Middle School Level: A Descriptive Study

This study will address a problem that is facing children of all ages, especially those at the middle school level; this serious issue is bullying. Bullying can be defined as the use of one's strength or status to intimidate, injure, or humiliate another person of lesser strength or status (“Safe schools project”, n.d.). Bullying can be physical, verbal, and emotional, and can be done in many ways. Technology has exacerbated the problem of bullying because it has led to what is known as ‘cyberbullying’; bullies can now harass victims via internet and text messaging in addition to in person. The discreetness of cyber bullying makes it difficult for teachers and parents to intervene and put an end to it. Because there are so many different ways for bullies to antagonize their peers, bullying has become a serious, widespread problem.

With bullying, there are always two and sometimes three roles involved: the bully or bullies, the victim(s), and the bystander(s). The bully is the perpetrator who intentionally inflicts physical, emotional, or psychological harm on a peer, and the victim is the person being bullied. Bullies typically seek victims who they perceive as weaker than they are and who often have some trait that can be construed as strange, making it easy to bully. Bullies are typically aggressive, violent, lacking in communication and social skills, and frequently have low self-esteem and come from broken homes (“Bullying in schools”, n.d). Bystanders are usually present while bullying is taking place. Bystanders are people who directly witness bullying but do not do anything to attempt to intervene or discourage the bully (“Wilde, M., n.d.). All these roles play an important part in bullying situations, and when one role is eliminated, the behavior can usually be deescalated.

Due to the media, bullying has been in the spotlight for the last several years, raising awareness on both how common bullying is in America’s schools and how bullying can have

severe negative effects on youth. Now that bullying is a widely discussed problem, many schools, both public and private, have implemented anti-bullying programs for students to participate in. There are many different curriculums schools can choose from. Some are designed so that teachers can lead them, and some involve trained professionals coming to schools to teach the programs. Anti-bullying programs tend to work by increasing awareness of the bullying taking place at the particular school and give students encouragement to report bullying when they witness it.

Approximately thirty percent of middle and high school students are involved with bullying at school in a given year ("Bullying statistics", n.d.). This number is likely higher since many instances of bullying go unreported. The issue of bullying is an important one because bullying can lead to a variety of problems for the victims, and the bullies themselves typically have problems as well. Usually, bullies come from homes where parents are not very involved in their lives and many of them have behavior problems, such as engaging in substance abuse and antisocial behaviors ("Keep School Safe", n.d.). Because of the underlying issues bullies deal with, they are much more likely than non-bullies to be arrested as young adults. Like their bullies, victims of bullying can be severely emotionally and psychologically damaged if bullied for a long period of time. Bullying victims often develop depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and a fear of going to school (NCVC, n.d.). These common feelings among victims can lead to truancy and substance abuse. Although one may think bullying only impacts the victim, bullies are often equally in need of help from professionals. As previously mentioned, the negative behaviors of bullies typically have meaning behind them. Bullying behaviors can serve as a manifestation of the feelings youth with family and social problems experience. A teen who

comes from a troubled home may use bullying to express the inner turmoil he or she is feeling. Both the bully and the victim need to be studied in order to truly understand this matter.

School social workers face bullying problems on a regular basis. Within a school, the role of the social worker is to help students who experience a variety of adjustment and mental health problems; both academic and personal. Social workers interact with students much differently than teachers do. School social workers work with students at a more personal level, therefore making them likely to both come across bullying and address it. A teacher may notice bullying and handle it by punishing the bully, but the social worker is the person who would thoroughly explore the issue. At the middle and high school levels, bullying can be brought to a social worker's attention in different ways. A teacher may notice it and refer the students involved, a student may confide in the social worker that he or she is being bullied, or the social worker may notice signs of bullying in a particular student and discuss it with him or her. No matter how the social worker learns of the problem, he or she will intervene through mechanisms such as individual and/or group counseling with both bullies and victims, working on improving students' self-esteem, and will sometimes implement school-wide bullying prevention programs.

Since the fatal Columbine High School shooting in 1999, laws and policies regarding bullying have been instituted in schools across the United States. Individual schools have policies regarding bullying, and in addition to these policies, many states have formal laws requiring bullying prevention programs ("School Security", n.d.). Schools that implement bullying policies and anti-bullying programs usually see a reduction in bullying behaviors. A 2006 study revealed that the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was fifty percent effective in the school systems in which it was used ("Juvenile Justice", n.d.).

The problem of bullying in middle and high schools is an important issue that needs to be further addressed. The specific aspects of bullying that need to be further studied are what causes bullies to bully peers and how victims cope with the way they are being treated by classmates at school. When teens bully, it is likely they are experiencing some sort of personal problem that needs treatment, and those who are victims develop problems that need to be treated. All students who are involved with bullying, regardless of whether they are bullies or victims, need interventions before more serious issues develop. The problems both victims and bullies face can affect society as a whole since they can lead to more violent acts, suicides, and an increase in substance abuse. The more that is known about the issues associated with bullying, the more social workers can do to prevent it and develop better understandings of how to treat bullies and victims. This study will further explore causes of bullying behaviors and the coping mechanisms victims use. The information gathered can potentially be useful in raising awareness on this topic and for creating new policies on bullying.

Literature Review

The Bully

Over the last several years, many studies have been done to create portraits of ‘typical bullies’. Researchers including Espelage and Asidao (2001) have tried to create a bully portrait so that other areas of bullying could be further studied. Several studies have concluded that there are similar characteristics of adolescents who bully peers in school settings. Espelage and Asidao (2001) concluded that typical bullies have positive attitudes toward violence, are impulsive, have a strong desire for domination, and rarely express empathy for their victims. The aggressiveness of bullies combined with their lack of regard for others enables them to victimize peers without second thought.

Researchers have also attempted to discover how bullies are perceived by their peers at school. Studies have taken a close look at the popularity of bullies among peers, how well liked bullies are, and peer judgments of bullies. One study revealed that bullies are usually average or slightly below average in terms of popularity among peers (Espelage & Asidao, 2001). It stands to reason that bullies would not be popular among peers since they seek out to hurt classmates. Another study by Parault, Davis & Pellegrini (2007) showed that bullies are popular within smaller peer groups. This study stated that bullies are often friends with other bullies, creating an atmosphere of constant competition among bullies. Within a group of bullies, teens act aggressive toward one another to gain the highest social status of that particular group (Parault, et. al., 2007).

During the middle school years it is not uncommon for youth who are bullies to be considered popular by other peers. A study completed at a suburban Virginia middle school found a different view of the bully. This study by Thunfors & Cornell (2008) discovered that bullies received sixty-one percent more popularity nominations than students who were not involved in bullying, and six times more nominations than bullying victims. An explanation to this shocking finding may be that during early adolescence, children use bullying as a means to achieve high levels of popularity. The researchers who completed this study stressed the fact that bullies were not necessarily well-liked since they received several popularity nominations; they concluded that other students may have thought these bullies were popular but still did not like them (Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). The popularity of bullies seems to vary depending on factors such as age and whether popularity is among an entire school or within specific groups.

Another fact to take into consideration when studying the popularity of bullies is the type of bully a particular student is. Certain bullies are better liked than others by their peers. ‘Clever

bullies', who are usually popular, smart, confident and sociable are often well-liked by peers, whereas 'not-so-clever bullies' who are anti-social, intimidating, mean-spirited, insecure, and angry are not highly ranked among peers (Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan, 2004). In Thunfors and Cornell's (2008) bullying study, they found that females were more likely to be considered 'popular' bullies and that 'non-popular' bullies were often simultaneously victimized by other bullies. When determining the peer perception and popularity of bullies, it is important to differentiate between the different types of bullies.

Adolescent bullies get in trouble at school for a variety of reasons aside from victimizing peers. Since many bullies are oppositional toward adults, they are notorious for breaking rules at school (Harris, Petrie & Willoughby, 2002). One would expect bullies to have greater numbers of disciplinary actions on record since refusal to obey teachers' rules generally results in some form of punishment. A study by Thunfors & Cornell (2008) showed that students who reported bullying peers 'about once per week' had three disciplinary referrals, one suspension and an average attitude toward aggression score of 16.7, meaning these students were more prone than those with lower scores to act out in aggressive ways. In the same study, students who reported not being bullies had one disciplinary referral, 0.2 suspensions, and an attitude toward aggression average score of 12 (Branson & Cornell, 2009). This data reveals that bullies do in fact get in trouble at school more regularly than non-bullies. The highly structured environment of school combined with the aggressive and oppositional behaviors of bullies creates a difficult situation.

In addition to disciplinary problems at school, it evident that teenagers who are bullies often get in trouble during the after school hours and on weekends. Seventy percent of adolescents who scored in the top quarter range on a *Self-Reported Delinquency* tool were also confirmed to be bullies through the use of another tool designed to measure pro-social behavior.

In this particular study completed by Baldry and Farrington (2000), the *Self-Reported Delinquency* tool asked students to indicate if they had ever been involved in delinquent acts such as breaking and entering, theft, carrying a weapon, drinking alcohol, using drugs, etc., and another survey was used to gather data on bullying behaviors (Baldry and Farrington, 2000). The fact that many bullies scored high on this measuring instrument is perhaps related to the aggressive and anti-social behavior that is typical of bullies as well as criminals.

Youth who are both bullies and delinquents tend to continue having trouble with the law into adulthood. Sixty percent of young men who report being bullies during grades six through nine have one court conviction by age twenty-four, and thirty-five to forty percent of bullies obtain three or more court convictions during young adulthood. Only ten percent of boys who were not bullies during adolescence were arrested and convicted during their young adult years (Parault, et. al, 2007). The correlation between bullies being delinquent as teenagers and the higher number of convictions former bullies acquire as adults compared to non-bullies suggests that bullies have criminal tendencies.

The families of bullies can contribute to the behavior of bullies at school. Many children who bully have parents who use physical punishment at home (Harris et. al., 2001), which teaches these children to act aggressively at school. Parents of bullies are also known to be inconsistent with both punishment and affection (Baldry & Farrington, 2000). They may be harsh with their child at one time and loving at another, sending a confusing message to the child. If children are not exposed to positive relationships at home with family members, it is difficult for them to build friendships at school. When parents are authoritarian, children come to believe that power is important in relationships (Nation, et. al., 2008) and constantly try to gain power over their peers. In cases where bullies are trying to be powerful, the individuals may be

trying to compensate for the sense of powerlessness they are actually feeling due to their relationships with their authoritarian parents.

Besides parenting styles and conflict between parents, another family factor that contributes to bullying behaviors in youth is substance abuse (Nation, et. al., 2008). Parents who abuse drugs and/or alcohol are less likely to be monitoring their teens' activities, and parental monitoring does have an effect on bullying, particularly indirect bullying. The communication between non-bullies and parents tends to be stronger than it is with bullies and their parents. Thus, parents of non-bullies know more about their children's social lives (Marini, Dane & Bosacki, 2006). It is important for parents and teenagers to have good relationships because the quality of the relationship effects how open lines of communication are.

Current information on the mental health of bullies is conflicting. Some studies, such as one completed by Harris, have concluded that bullies generally do not have mental health problems and others have determined bullies do have issues related to mental health. Harris, et. al, (2001) reported bullies not having anxiety or insecurities and that contrary to popular belief, they did not have low-self esteem. During the middle school years, some bullies are popular so their mental health is as good as those who are not involved with bullying (Graham & Bellmore, 2007). Youth who have friends usually function better mentally than youth who do not have friends. That being said, bullies who have friends would be less likely to endure mental health problems.

Although Harris, et. al (2001) reported bullies have normal mental health, others such as Dennhey (1997) have found that bullies do have mental health problems. In younger children, depression often manifests through aggressive behavior, and bullies are characterized as being aggressive. The aggressiveness of bullies in many occasions may in fact be expressions of

depression. In addition, a study by Kumpulain, Rasenen & Purra (2001) showed that bullies often have attention deficit disorder, depression, conduct disorders and that forty percent of bullies were being treated by mental health professionals. The conflicting information about bullies' mental health needs to be further studied so that more is known about whether most bullies have good or poor mental health. Knowing this information could help experts create more successful anti-bullying programs.

The Victim

Like bullies, victims of bullying also share many similar characteristics. The common stereotype of bullying victims is that they are nerdy or have a physical trait that makes it easy for bullies to single them out. During interviews, several middle school students reported that victims were targeted due to being poor, wearing glasses, being fat, and not wearing fashionable clothes (Espelage & Asidao, 2001). These particular students are also targeted because their physical features can cause them to feel self-conscious. Teens who feel self-conscious act vulnerable which attracts bullies to them (Perry, Hodges & Egan, 2001).

The behavior of victims has been a popular topic of study over the years. Victims of bullying are usually classified as being either passive or provocative. Passive victims of bullying tend to internalize their emotions resulting in depression, anxiety, and withdrawal in bullying situations. When this is the case, bullies begin to target victims even more because of the way they act after being bullied (Perry, et. al, 2001). It can be said that passive victims create a cycle of bullying because their behaviors after being bullied encourage bullies to continue bothering them. A middle school student said during an interview that some students are easier targets because they let bullying bother them and show they are upset; show that they are easy to bully (Espelage & Asidao, 2001). On the other hand, provocative victims are aggressive and tend to do

specific things that cause them to be bullied such as argue with peers, act in ways that peers find annoying, lie, and steal (Perry, et. al, 2001). Provocative victims externalize their emotions through trying to fight back with bullies and acting out in more aggressive, anti-social ways. Some provocative victims also internalize some of their emotions. Like passive victims, provocative victims create bullying cycles because their behaviors also encourage bullies to persist.

Certain parenting styles can make youth more prone to being victims of bullying and can affect the way teens handle being bullied. It has been previously noted that authoritarian parenting styles can cause children to become bullies at school, but this same style can also make some children more susceptible to becoming victims of bullying at school. As far as authoritarian parenting and its relationship to bullying victims, some victims take on their provocative behavior as a way of copying the antagonistic behavior of their parents, and some victims act submissive toward bullies because they are submissive at home when their parents are hostile (Nation, et. al., 2008). Whether children with authoritarian parents become aggressive or submissive during bullying situations must depend on things such as the temperament and personality of individual children. Also related to authoritarian parenting is the likelihood that a teen who is being bullied at school will report it to a parent. Presumably, youth with harsh, domineering parents would not have close relationships with them and would be less likely to talk to parents about problems. This is related to victims of bullying because adolescents with authoritarian parents are much less likely than those who have good relationships with their parents to report that they are being bullied at school. Unnever & Cornell (2004) discovered that students with authoritarian parents do in fact report bullying to parents much less often than students who are close with their parents.

Parents who are overprotective and intrusive also put their children at-risk for being bullied. These parents do not give their children space to learn how to do things such as resolve conflicts, make decisions, and act assertively (Perry, et. al, 2001). Children with this type of parent learn to rely on their parents too much and have trouble doing things independent of their parents at school. A victim who is used to his parents helping him everything would not have the skills to defend himself against a bully.

Victims of chronic school bullying can develop serious problems as a result of their experiences with peers. These problems include high numbers of absences from school, mental health problems, substance abuse, and delinquency. The way adolescents cope with bullying depends on personal traits and environmental factors such as supportive social systems (Smith, et. al., 2008). Those who are more resilient and have adequate social supports are not as likely to develop the aforementioned problems. Youth who have difficulty coping with bullying often begin to avoid school shortly after the bullying beings (Parault, et. al, 2007). Gastic (2008) reported that bullying victims in his study of high school students had fifty-eight percent more absences than non-victims. Although staying home from school may seem like an appropriate response to teens, it is still damaging to them because it hurts their academic performance. For students who miss a lot of school, when they go back and try to catch up on missed work, they begin to feel worse about themselves because they are often unable to complete assignments resulting in poor grades and even lower self-esteem (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). In severe cases, bullying may cause a student to drop-out of school. Adolescents who are bullied at school have higher rates of substance abuse and suicidal thoughts (Gastic, 2008). Additionally, youth who were victimized have more depression and anxiety in adulthood (Boivin, et. al., 2010). Bullying creates many problems for victims and these problems can be very long-lasting.

The Bully-Victim

Some students who are bullies or victims report they have also been in the opposite role at some time in their lives. Students who fit this description are known as bully-victims. Sometimes students who were bullied at school react to it by bullying other students. They feel it gives them a sense of reclaiming the power they lost to their own bullies (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Bullying other children at school makes them feel better and serves as a coping mechanism. Bully-victims report more internalization of emotions than students who are either bullies, victims, or uninvolved in bullying (Marini, Dane & Bosacki, 2006). Related to higher rates of internalization, bully-victims have more mental health problems than students who are only victims or bullies Adolescents in the bully-victim role had slightly higher rates of depression and considerably higher rates of oppositional/conduct disorders (Kumpulainen, et. al, 2001). School personnel have trouble working with bully-victims because it is difficult to understand how a student can be involved with both roles (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Since both behaviors are problematic, both need to be treated so the particular student can begin to function better.

Types of Bullying and Gender Differences

Bullying can be direct or indirect and physical or non-physical. Non-physical bullying constitutes verbal bullying, spreading rumors, exclusion, manipulation, destroying property, and similar behaviors. Direct bullying is physical or involves blatant verbal attacks and indirect bullying describes more discrete actions such as spreading rumors, deliberate exclusion, or making faces at victims (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Precise numbers on the incidence of each type of bullying were not found, however, it is believed that indirect, non-physical bullying is more common at the secondary level. This is believed because as children reach adolescence, their

language skills and social understanding progress, enabling them to use words and other tactics rather than physical aggression to harm peers (Craig, et. al., 2001).

Even though physical aggression does increase during the adolescent years, males still continue to use this form of bullying to some degree. In their study, Espelage and Asidao (2001) interviewed a boy who told them a story about being pushed and kicked in the locker room most days at school. Other studies have found that boys engage in this type of behavior at school as well. An explanation of physical aggression still being present in male students during early adolescence is that boys develop at a slower rate than girls, placing them behind girls in their verbal and social understanding development (Craig, et. al., 2001). As the development of boys catches up to that of girls, physical aggression becomes less prominent.

Female students begin using indirect bullying both earlier and more often than male students. In particular, adolescent girls are known to use two indirect types of bullying: relational and cyber. Relational bullying describes a form of indirect bullying in which relationships are used to hurt the victim (Crick, et. al., 2001), and cyberbullying is when technology such as cell phones, internet, chat rooms, and blogs are used victimize youth. When asked about why they acted this way, a common response from teenage girls was that they engage in this type of behavior to create excitement and give them something to do (Owens, Slee & Shute, 2001).

Adolescents will relationally bully friends by spreading rumors, threatening to end friendships if demands are not met, or deliberately excluding a certain friend. As with other types of bullying, the goal of relational bullying is for the bully to obtain power over the victim. Relational bullying occurs more commonly in female-to-female interactions during adolescence (Crick et. al., 2001). This is probably because girls develop the skills needed for verbal and indirect bullying earlier than boys. During interviews, teenage girls reported hostile behaviors

such as breaking confidences, using code names in front of victims, and huddling together to talk about other girls while glances over at them to make it known they were being talked about (Owens, et. al, 2001). Relational bullying can be especially damaging to young females because it causes them to feel 'alone' at school and has been shown to impact the way girls thought about themselves, causing a reduction in self-esteem levels (Casey-Cannon, Hayward & Gowan, 2001).

Adolescent girls also use cyberbullying more than their male classmates. At a middle school, thirty percent of the female students reported being cyberbullied within the last two months and seventeen percent admitted to cyberbullying other girls. This type of bullying is appealing to girls because it enables them to bully without the victim knowing who they are (Chu, 2005). Since this type of bullying is not face-to-face, bullies are even more shameless than usual and victims face a new element of torment because they do not know who their bully is.

Adolescent development and the significance of social groups

During the adolescent years, youth begin to spend less time with family members and start forming more intimate relationships with friends at school. The need to 'fit in' at school becomes very important to teenagers and they place a large emphasis on being considered part of a certain peer group. This desire to belong to a group is because adolescence is a time when people form their identities (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). It can be difficult for teens to find a group of people they truly mesh with because they are still learning who they are. Teenagers also enhance their cognitive abilities during these years. Critical thinking, social cognition, emotional intelligence, and moral judgment all develop significantly during these years (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). These developments contribute to the excessive bullying that takes place during the early adolescent years. Within groups at school, peers who are in the same groups may be at different

stages of development, causing them to clash with one another. Important elements of groups are homogeneity and cohesion. When teens are at different places developmentally, it can create conflict throwing off the sense of homogeneity and cohesion necessary for the group to function (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001). Conflict among group members can lead to some of the bullying behaviors found at secondary schools, in particular indirect, relational victimization. When a group member is being bullied, other group members usually do not intervene because they feel that if they do, they will further disrupt the group function and become victims themselves (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Some students who are victims of bullying withdraw from interacting with peers and isolate themselves. When youth do not participate in peer relationships, it impedes their social development making it even more difficult for them to fit in with peers (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001). The developmental stage of young adolescents creates an environment in which bullying behaviors can thrive and become very prevalent.

Reporting of bullying and victimization

As previously mentioned, bullying during the secondary school years transitions from being direct and physical to being more indirect and verbal. There are no statistics that accurately reflect how much bullying goes in at middle and high schools because much of it goes unreported. At the middle school level, forty-three percent of teachers, (Conoley, 2008), and eighty to ninety percent of students (Espelage & Asidao, 2001) report that bullying takes place during school. The number of students who report bullying fluctuates, but eighty to ninety percent was the highest statistic found. The numbers vary because students have the tendency to not report when they are being bullied at this age. Older students report bullying less than elementary level students because teenagers are constantly trying to become more independent, more concerned with what peers think of them, and fear telling an adult will cause them to be

further victimized (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). The unwillingness of adolescents to tell adults about being bullied can worsen internalization and the associated issues. Like victims, bullies are not honest about reporting their behavior because they are under the impression that admitting to being bullies will result in punishment (Branson & Cornell, 2009). Since bullying for this age group tends to be discrete, it is easy for victims and bullies to get away without school staff and parents to find out about what is going on.

An interesting aspect of bullying reporting is that numbers differ according to whether studies are self or peer reported. In general, peer reports showed higher occurrences of bullying and self reports produced lower numbers. In a study, twenty-three students claimed to never bully students yet each received several peer nominations as being bullies, and twelve students who reported not being victimized were nominated by peers as being regular victims (Branson & Cornell, 2009). These differences in reporting go along with the earlier mentioned reasons why teens do not report being victims bullying or to actually being bullies.

Also interesting when looking at the reporting of bullying is who victims tell their problem about when they do report it. Teenagers who have quality relationships with their parents are more likely to talk to them about problems they are having at school (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Students with such parents are comfortable talking to their parents about being bullied because they know their parents will listen to them and try to help. Students prefer to talk to non-bullying peers about their victimization. Girls especially were found to talk to peers about their experiences with being bullied (Branson & Cornell, 2009).

Teachers and bullying

Teachers at middle and high schools have expressed a variety of feelings toward bullying at their schools. Some teachers are unaware of bullying and some are aware of it but do not attempt to resolve it. Many teachers do not have enough knowledge of bullying to detect bullying within their classrooms (Allen, 2010). When referring to female students and their indirect bullying behaviors, several teachers said that they can usually tell something is going on but cannot gather enough information to prove there is a problem or intervene (Owens, et. al, 2001). Research has shown that teachers have a more difficult time identifying bullying at the secondary school level than at the elementary level. Leff et. al (1999) credited their finding that middle school teachers have a harder time detecting bullying than elementary school teachers to the fact that middle school teachers have less contact with their students than elementary school teachers and because bullying becomes more covert as children age. This combination of spending less time with students and students bullying each other in more indirect ways makes it difficult for teachers to notice problems among children.

Additionally, teachers define bullying differently; some consider name-calling and spreading rumors to be bullying while other teachers only consider direct physical and verbal assault to be bullying (Allen, 2010). Differing understandings of bullying contribute to teachers not intervening when they should. Teachers and students have both reported that teachers do not notice bullying as much as students do because often times students have different relationships with teachers than they do with each other. A student may act nice in front of teachers but then in less structured environments act negatively toward peers (Leff, et. al, 1999). It is problematic when teachers are unable to detect bullying enough to get involved because students usually do not approach teachers first, leaving the behavior to go unreported. Universal definitions of

bullying and bullying policies within schools would alleviate the issue of teachers not noticing bullying or intervening when observing aggressive behaviors (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). When all staff members within a given school have the same perception of bullying, it is more likely that teachers will both notice and address any bullying behaviors they witness.

As with parental styles, teacher styles can either contribute to or reduce the prevalence of bullying. Authoritarian teachers encourage bullying by acting controlling and through exerting excessive power over students as bullies do over their peers (Sullivan, et. al. 2004). Permissive teachers also increase the likelihood that bullying behaviors will occur in their classrooms because they tend to ignore student behaviors and have insufficient rules (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Teachers who fall into either of these categories would benefit from bullying and classroom management trainings because such additional knowledge would better equip them to address issues that arise in their classrooms.

Within classroom settings, authoritative teachers are most likely to both notice bullying and address it. Teachers who act authoritatively pay attention to power distribution in classes and try to keep it in balance as well as set examples of behavior that is acceptable (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Authoritative teachers are excellent at teaching students to respect one another because they address issues and create environments in which students feel comfortable talking about problems. Teachers who use an authoritative style have been shown to empower students who either are victims or are at risk of becoming victims of bullies. These teachers attempt to instill assertiveness and social competence within students who struggle with peers (Nation, et. al, 2007).

Interventions/Success rates

As awareness of bullying has increased over the years, so have anti-bullying interventions. There are a variety of intervention options including counseling for victims and bullies, school-wide programs, peer mentorship/mediation, and role playing. When students were interviewed, they seemed to think getting parents and teachers involved, using comprehensive anti-bullying programs, and implementing peer-support groups would all be successful interventions (Crothers, Kolbert & Barker, 2006). All of these interventions involve talking about the problem, so it can be interpreted that students believe talking and raising awareness is the best way to handle the issue of bullying.

A popular method of intervention at schools has been use of the 'whole-school approach'. This anti-bullying intervention method attempts to include the entire school and address any present bullying issues from many levels and dimensions (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). Schools that use this approach can implement a variety of programs and activities to engage students. A progressive middle school in California has created an anti-bullying program that uses lunch groups, diversity discussions, literature and films, violence prevention, and parental involvement to develop a 'bully-free school' (Murawski, 2010). This wide variety of programs covers lots of material, providing students with a rich knowledge base which they can use to ensure positive interactions with one another. Other schools use 'whole-school approaches' that involve student leadership and peer mentoring. Peer leadership and mentoring programs involve older or more mature students who possess admirable qualities serving as role models to the study body and helping peers with conflicts or struggles (Sullivan, et. al, 2004). No matter what initiatives are taken under the 'whole-school approach', any efforts to involve the school in its entirety seem to reduce bullying and create positive school climates.

Conclusions

After an extensive review of the literature, it can be stated that bullying is a prominent issue within schools, especially at the secondary school level. Studies that were previously mentioned have come to differing conclusions on common characteristics of bullies, victims, and bully-victims, requiring further study to determine similarities between children and youth who play roles in bullying. Literature on the topic of bullying has indicated that certain types of parenting and teaching styles can encourage as well as prevent bullying. Some parenting styles make children more prone to being bullies or victims, likewise, particular teaching styles can encourage aggressive behavior among students. Also interesting are the tendencies of reporting bullying behaviors. Students seem to report bullying at higher levels when it is peer-reported rather than self-reported, and teachers appear less aware of the bullying that takes place in their schools than students. The literature discussed anti-bullying interventions that schools have been using in recent years; however, opinions of program effectiveness have not been thoroughly evaluated.

Although heavily studied during the last decade, many questions around bullying within schools remain unanswered. This study intends to further explore bullying at the middle school level in order to help schools develop better understandings of the issue and create more effective anti-bullying interventions. In particular, this study will take a closer look at characteristics of students who bully and who are victims of bullying, the mental health status of bullies and victims, the frequency of the bully-victim, the role teachers and school social workers play in bullying, and overall school climate. Additional study of peer bullying among adolescents will provide insight for ways to reduce this all too common problem and improve school experiences for teenagers today and in the future. The research questions for this study

will include: How common is bullying at the middle school level? What types of bullying behaviors do students within this age group use? What are common characteristics of students who are bullies and victims? And, have teachers been given enough training in addressing bullying?

Methodology

This research study was a descriptive exploratory study. The purpose of the study is to gather information on peer bullying at the middle school level.

Sample

The participants in this study were teachers and a social worker at a suburban middle school in eastern Connecticut. The middle school consisted of students in grades seven and eight. Teachers and the social worker were recruited using convenience sampling. The researcher attempted to survey and interview teachers of various ages, levels of experience, and who teach different subjects so that the sample would be representative of the school.

Data gathering

Data for this study was gathered using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Prior to the distribution of surveys, a consent letter was issued to potential participants (Appendix A). The process and anonymity of the interviews was explained to potential participants and agreeing to be interviewed served as consent. Teachers were first given a survey (Appendix B) which was designed to obtain demographic information on each participant and included questions about students and bullying to be answered using a Likert Scale. After completing the survey, a smaller sample of teachers and the one social worker were interviewed individually by the researcher. The researcher asked teachers and the social worker about their observations of bullying behaviors and if/how they intervene when witnessing aggressive behaviors. Each

interview was based on a set of guiding questions (Appendix C and Appendix D). These interviews supplemented the surveys and allowed teachers and the social worker to discuss bullying in a more detailed and insightful manner.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through the use of SPSS computer software. Various charts and graphs were created to display results of the study. The charts and graphs reveal descriptives and frequencies related to bullying at this school. These charts and graphs were later used to draw conclusions and make recommendations for anti-bullying interventions.

Findings

Quantitative Data

Surveys were given to all 58 teachers and twenty-five teachers returned completed surveys. An additional five teachers volunteered to be interviewed along with the school social worker. For the teachers who completed surveys, all twenty-five were Caucasian. Seventeen of them were female and eight were male. The average age of the participants was 39.8 years old. The mean for total number of years teaching was 12 and the mean for number of years teaching at this particular school was 9.5. Participants all taught one of the following subjects: Physical Education/Health, Art, Special Education, Reading, Social Studies, World Languages, Science, English, Family/Consumer Sciences, and Math.

Of the 16 questions on the survey, 14 of them asked participants to choose a number on a scale stating how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement. On the scale, a 1 indicated that the participant strongly disagreed, a two indicated disagreement, a three indicated slight disagreement, a four was neutral, a five indicated the participant slightly agreed, a six indicated the participant agreed, and finally a seven indicated that the participant strongly agreed.

In addition to the 14 scaled questions, the survey included two qualitative questions that allowed participants to write a sentence or two expressing their thoughts. Below are figures that show the mean response for each scaled survey question. For the qualitative survey questions, the researcher has selected a few quotes from participants to display in this section. Quotes from participant interviews have also been included in this section.

Figure 1 shows the mean score for Question 1, which asked participants about bullying behaviors in their classrooms. The mean score was 3.36, indicating that on average, participants fell between somewhat disagreeing and being neutral on this topic.

Figure 1: I observe bullying in my classroom.

1----------2----------3-----l-------4----------5----------6----------7

Strongly disagree 3.36 Neutral Strongly agree

Figure 2 illustrates the mean score for Question 2 on the survey which asked participants about behaviors that they consider to be bullying. The mean score was 5.84 showing that participants agreed that bullying behaviors included behaviors other than physical and/or verbal assault.

Figure 2: I consider behaviors other than physical and/or verbal assault to be bullying.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5------l---6----------7

Strongly disagree Neutral 5.8 Strongly agree

Question 3 on the survey asked participants the qualitative question, “Please describe any other behaviors you consider to be bullying.” The majority of participants commented on the indirect bullying behaviors they frequently observe among their students. Common themes in responses included exclusion of certain students, body language and spreading rumors about other students. One teacher stated that, “deliberately excluding other students” is bullying.

Another said that, “spreading rumors, certain body language, and laughing at jokes about others” are types of bullying behaviors.

Figure 4 illustrates the mean score for Question 4, which asked participants about the bullying behaviors they observe in the hallways of the school while students are switching classes. The mean score was 4.84 showing that participants were between being neutral about this statement or agreeing slightly that they observe bullying behaviors in the hallways.

Figure 4: I observe bullying behaviors in the hallways between classes.

1----------2----------3----------4--------l----5---------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 4.84 Strongly agree

Figure 5 illustrates the mean score for Question 5, which asked participants about the bullying they observe in the cafeteria during lunch. The mean score was 4.84 revealing that participants were between being neutral and somewhat agreeing about there being bullying in the school cafeteria.

Figure 5: I observe bullying behaviors in the cafeteria during lunch.

1----------2----------3----------4--------l----5---------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 4.84 Strongly agree

Figure 6 illustrates the mean score for Question 6, which concerned whether observed bullying tends to be more indirect than direct. The mean score of 5.4 shows that participants agreed that the bullying they witness is more indirect than direct.

Figure 6: The bullying I observe is more indirect than direct.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5---l------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 5.4 Strongly agree

Figure 7 illustrates the mean score for Question 7, which asked participants if they believe the bullying they observe is more verbal than physical. The mean score was 5.92, showing that participants agreed that bullying is more verbal than physical at this school.

Figure 7: The bullying I observe is more verbal than physical.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5-------|--6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 5.92 Strongly agree

Figure 8 illustrates the mean score for Question 8, which asked about traits of bullying victims. The mean score of 5.04 reveals that participants slightly agreed that victims tend to be unpopular, passive, depressed, and have low self-esteem.

Figure 8: Victims of bullying tend to be unpopular, passive, depressed, and have low self-esteem.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5-|--------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 5.04 Strongly agree

Figure 9 illustrates the mean score for Question 9, which asked participants about common traits of students who are bullies at their school. The mean score of 3.52 shows that participants were in slight disagreement or neutral about the suggested traits of bullies.

Figure 9: Bullies tend to be popular, confident, and mentally healthy.

1----------2----------3------|------4----------5---------6----------7
Strongly disagree 3.52 Neutral Strongly agree

Figure 10 illustrates the mean score for survey Question 10, which asked if participants believed there was more bullying among female than male students. The mean score of 4.16 shows that participants were neutral about this statement.

Figure 10: I observe more bullying among female students than male students.

1----------2----------3----------4-l----------5---------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 4.16 Strongly agree

Figure 11 illustrates the mean score for survey Question 11, which asked participants about students who hold the dual role of being both bullies and victim simultaneously. The mean score was 5.32, revealing that participants agreed that there are such students at their school.

Figure 11: I know of students who are both bullies and victims of bullying

1----------2----------3----------4----------5---l------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 5.32 Strongly agree

Figure 12 illustrates the mean score for Question 12, which asked participants if students report bullying to adults within the school. The mean score for this question was 4.28, showing that participants were neutral toward this statement.

Figure 12: Students report bullying to teachers and other adults in the building.

1----------2----------3----------4--l---------5---------6----------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 4.28 Strongly agree

Figure 13 illustrates the mean score for Question 13, which asked participants if they intervene when they witness bullying. The mean score was 6.44 showing that participants agreed rather strongly that they do in fact intervene when witnessing bullying.

Figure 13: When I witness bullying I intervene.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5---------6-----l-------7
Strongly disagree Neutral 6.44 Strongly agree

Question 14 on the survey asked participants the qualitative question, “Describe how you intervene when you witness bullying.” The majority of the participants commented that they address bullying by speaking directly to both the bully(s) and victim(s) and discipline accordingly once they know more about the situation. For instance, one participant stated, “I tell the bully to stop and then I usually have a conversation privately with that person. I also try to talk to the victim to see if they are ok and would like help with reporting it.” Another teacher described intervening in the following way: “This is situation dependent; if it is a single, first, negligible offense in the classroom, I verbally reprimand the student. If the situation is repeated, and/or more pronounced, that student is removed from the classroom and admonished. Repeated offenses range from detentions to office referrals.”

Figure 15 shows the mean score for Question 15, which asked participants about making referrals to the school social worker and/or psychologist as part of their interventions with students. The mean score was 4.84, showing that participants fell between being neutral and slightly agreeing about this statement.

Figure 15: I refer bullies and victims to the school social worker and/or psychologist when I intervene.

1----------2----------3----------4---------l---5---------6----------7

Strongly disagree Neutral 4.84 Strongly agree

Finally, Figure 16 shows the mean score for Question 16, which asked participants about anti-bullying training for school staff. The mean score for this question was 5.00 even, revealing that participants slightly agreed that staff training is adequate.

Figure 16: School staff has been provided with adequate anti-bullying training.

1----------2----------3----------4----------5l---------6----------7

Strongly disagree Neutral 5.00 Strongly agree

Qualitative Data

The interviews with teachers and the school social worker supplemented the information found in the data gathered through use of the survey instrument. During the interviews, teachers and the social worker were able to share personal stories and experiences regarding bullying, discuss observations on students who are involved with bullying and the types of bullying behaviors that occur within the school, and their methods for addressing bullying. Two male and three female teachers were interviewed. These teachers were all Caucasian and their ages were not reported. Each of the teachers taught one of the following subjects: Physical Education/Health, Math, Special Education, Spanish, and Art.

When asked about identifying bullying behaviors, a common theme was teachers stating that there is a fine line between students joking around with one another and bullying one another. According to these teachers, sometimes a situation will start out as students joking with each other, but then one of the students involved will become offended and the situation quickly becomes one of bullying. Students will also try to claim to a teacher that they were “kidding around” with a classmate when accused of bullying by a teacher. Teachers said that at times it is difficult to determine if the behavior is bullying or if it is in fact simply students joking. The teachers seemed to agree that if anything about the “joke” could be construed as being offensive that they let the student(s) know their behavior is inappropriate and that if it continues they will be written up for bullying.

Similarly, one of the female teachers said that she believes with middle school students, sometimes their attempts at flirting with the opposite sex come out in the form of bullying. She stated in her interview:

> Sometimes when the kids want to flirt it comes out as teasing and bullying because they are not socially aware of how to approach someone they like. You know… in elementary school they punch the person in the arm and in middle school they punch the person mentally.

This teacher also said that similar to it being difficult to determine whether students are bullying or joking with each other, it can be difficult to determine if a student is flirting or bullying. Students at this age and stage of development are often times not aware of how their actions are perceived by others. She shared an example to illustrate her point:

> I had a girl start making fun of a boy's football uniform because it was too big. And I went over and I said, "Well either you're flirting with him or you're just being downright mean. So, do you like him or should I write you up for bullying?" She said, "I don't like him!" Then I said, "Then I should write you up for bullying."" She was caught then… she couldn't win either way. So I put it very bluntly and told her that if it happened again I would write her up because that was bullying. And I don't even think she understood…she just saw that his shirt was so long that it looked like a dress and thought it was funny and started laughing at him.

The teachers who were interviewed additionally spoke about the types of students who are typically involved with bullying as either bullies or victims. When describing bullies, one teacher observed that, "These students tend to need a great deal of attention whether it is positive or negative. They want to feel important and be part of a group of friends." One of the male teachers stated, "Bullying can be a cycle. It can be a learned behavior. Children who have parents who are bullies are more likely to be bullies themselves. I think that sometimes bullies have self-esteem and self-confidence issues themselves." The stories and thoughts shared during interview align with the mean score for the survey question related to characteristics of bullies.

As for students who are victims of bullying, teachers seemed to agree that students who stand out for any reason, whether it be appearance, intelligence level, "being weird", etc., are more prone to become victimized by bullies. A male teacher stated that middle school age

children are in a difficult position because they want to be different but cannot be too different from their peers. He said, “Kids this age are interesting. They want to be different and sometimes try to be different but if they’re too different, they get bullied. There’s a ‘good’ different and a ‘bad’ different for this age group.” Students who fall under the category of being “bad” different are the ones who become victims. Another teacher expressed that she did not necessarily think that it is only the odd students who are victims of bullying. She said:

> I assume the popular kids get picked on too but I think they maybe have enough self-assurance to stop it or let it roll off their backs or just walk away and not let it bother them. The less popular kids are maybe just more sensitive and can’t let it roll off their backs.

This insightful comment suggests that there are personality differences between those students who become chronic victims of bullying and those who as this teacher worded it are able to let it roll off their backs.

With regards to the types of bullying behaviors teachers observe at this school, the behaviors discussed during interviews were reflective of the survey questions related to behaviors. The teachers who were interviewed agreed that the behaviors they witness most of the time are more indirect and subtle. The interviews provided additional information beyond what was discovered from viewing the surveys. One of the interview participants stated:

> Of the bullying I’ve seen, I’d say 90% of it has been what I would call ‘under cover experiences’. [The behaviors] are under the radar of most people---not experiences or things that you see outwardly---you know, violently pushing someone---you see that occasionally but most if it is more subtle. At this age level particularly it tends to be, from my experience, it’s often not a single person that’s being bullied or is involved with the bullying---it can be a collection of people. So, there’s a ring of culprits as well as a ring of victims. It’s not a solo thing…that’s what I’m seeing…there’s usually other people involved…a ‘pecking order’ so to speak in bullying.

The statement about bullying occurring in groups was interesting because the survey instrument did not underscore this topic. The same teacher who shared the above quote also discussed a problem he had in one of his classes recently; a group of girls singled out a boy who was "nerdy" and deliberately made comments about him right in front of him so that he could hear what they were saying about him. This teacher said that this incident was telling of both how middle school students bully in groups and how they typically use subtle or passive-aggressive bullying tactics.

The school social worker, a female, was able to discuss bullying from a different perspective than the teachers due to the nature of her work. Because girls tend to be more indirect with their bullying behaviors, the social worker said in her interview that:

> I think female aggression is a lot harder to deal with than male aggression. I think it's much more insidious and I think it sticks with girls and it really goes to their core, as opposed to, not that I'm an advocate of physical fighting, but I think that becomes less personalized and internalized than what girls do to each other.

The social worker provided some particularly interesting information in regards to the mental health and substance abuse habits of students who are involved with bullying. In her experience, both bullies and victims tend to come from difficult backgrounds and are more prone to having mental health and substance abuse issues. She said:

> I think there's a higher incidence of mental health and substance abuse problems among both bullies and victims. I think to be a bully or a victim is pretty depressing…you know, that there's going to be some depression around it. And with substance abuse also, to try and deal with…I mean I always look at substance abuse not in a moral way but more as an attempt to feel normal. So, if you feel so depressed you want to feel better and if you feel so hyper and agitated you want to feel calmer…it's an attempt to normalize how you feel. I think both of those things are at a higher rate for those involved with bullying.

She was also more able than the teachers to speak about the mental health of students involved with bullying. Along with depression, she said that there is a high prevalence of anxiety among students at this middle school. According to her:

> There has been such an increase in anxiety in the past 5-8 years. We are seeing so much more anxiety in children and I think it's because there's so much more anxiety in families…and not even just the last two years with the economy, but just in general the anxiety among these kids is astounding. Anxiety is very huge right now. And not knowing what to do, how to deal with it---I think part of it is that in a community like this one, the parents are 'helicopter parents' and don't allow their kids to experience life to some degree on their own. So, how do you become competent and confident? When a kid has a problem with a teacher, before the kid tries to deal with it, they go to their mom for her to solve it for them. Kids aren't learning how to problem solve and that makes them very anxious.

This increase in the amount of anxiety middle school students face creates an environment in which bullying behaviors can thrive because acting aggressively toward others can be used as a coping mechanism for youth to alleviate their anxiety.

Summary and Implications

As discovered in previous studies on middle school bullying, the bullying at this suburban middle school was mostly indirect and verbal rather than physical. Several participants reported that because of the types of bullying students this age use, it can be difficult to notice when bullying behaviors are taking place. Teachers also reported noticing more bullying in the hallways and in the cafeteria than in their classrooms. This observation is likely due to the fact that students have less supervision in the hallways and cafeteria than they do in classes.

Based on the results of this study, much was learned about bullying and the matters related to bullying at this school. Although legitimate findings were discovered, it must be pointed out that this study had some limitations. The school where the study took place is homogeneous and almost 100 percent Caucasian. As a result, the findings of this study may not be applicable to schools with more diversity. Schools with more students of diverse backgrounds may have different reports of bullying. Another limitation of this study is that more female than male teachers participated. The findings would have been more representative if more males had

participated. A final limitation is that only one school was studied, making it difficult to generalize all middle school bullying based on this study.

Teachers as well as the school social worker indicated that many victims of bullying are unpopular, passive, and have low self-esteem. Other students are able to detect these characteristics and know that these particular students will be easier to bully. This study did not reach a conclusion about characteristics of bullies. Some of the literature had suggested that students who are bullies are popular and self-confident, while other literature suggested bullies are the opposite of being popular and self-confident. The results of this study show that teachers were neutral about bullies having these characteristics, implying that bullies may not necessarily be popular or confident. The school social worker stated in her interview that she has found a drastic increase in the amount of anxiety students experience today. She believes this contributes largely to bullying because when students feel stressed, they may cope by acting out or by internalizing, making them easier targets.

The literature review indicated that bullying tends to be a bigger problem for females than males at the middle school level. Participants in this study were neutral about whether or not female students exhibit more bullying behaviors than males, which was interesting. However, the school social worker discussed this point during her interview and said that she feels whether or not girls bully each other more than boys do, girls internalize their negative emotions more and the bullying "goes to their cores." This goes along with the results of previous studies on middle school bullying, such as the one done by Casey-Cannon, Hayward & Gowan, (2001), because they also found that girls' self-esteem is more impacted by bullying and that bullying affects girls for longer periods of time; girls are less able to take bullying with a grain of salt than boys.

A final point about the results of this study was how teachers felt about the amount of anti-bullying training they have been provided with. The mean score of the survey question that asked if participants felt they had been provided with adequate training in this area was a five, meaning that teachers were only in slight agreement they have received enough training. During the interviews, some of the interviewees felt the school administration was providing enough training, while others stated that they wished there could be more time spent on the topic of bullying. Those who felt more training was needed believed that specialized anti-bullying training by outside professionals would be more helpful than briefly discussing bullying at ordinary staff development workshops. Participants with this belief thought specialized training would create more consistency and uniformity in the way teachers address bullying.

The results of this study on middle school bullying can be of use to this particular middle school and ones similar to it, as well as for creating larger scale policies. By reviewing the results of this study, staff at the middle school where it was conducted can use the findings to make various changes, creating a more bullying-free environment. Additionally, schools with similar compositions can learn about their own schools and make similar changes. This study can also be of use when the state of Connecticut evaluates legislation related to bullying. School bullying has been a heated topic lately and stricter policies against bullying have been coming up during recent House and Senate sessions.

In respect to social work practice, social workers in school settings and those who work with adolescents can learn from this study. The findings show that students who are victims of bullying frequently have mental health problems that can both cause and exacerbate the internalization of emotions related to bullying. Social workers should also be mindful of the fact that bullying and aggression can often times be learned behaviors. Students who are displaying

aggressive behaviors at school may be facing domestic problems that require clinical treatment (i.e. counseling by the school social worker). Social workers in school settings can work toward encouraging teachers and principals to send students who are involved with bullying to be evaluated by them. This would ensure that any co-concurring problems beyond the bullying itself are being taken care of.

As evidenced in this study, bullying does exist in middle schools and is something that teachers and school administration should be aware of. The difficult adolescent years can be made much easier for youth today if schools implement more rules and policies regarding bullying. Students are much more likely to have positive school experiences and successful futures when they attend schools with positive, bully-free environments. Schools with such environments enable youth to become confident, pro-social and flourishing young adults, able to establish healthy communities.

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Appendix A

Survey Consent

Dear Participant,

I am a social work student at Providence College and am currently completing a thesis on bullying among middle school students. In order to obtain date for my study, I will be conducting research at your middle school. Knowledge of bullying and its effects can help with the development of efforts to reduce such behaviors within school settings. Data gathered for this study will be anonymously reported in my thesis and displayed on the Providence College Digital Commons database.

At this time, I am recruiting teachers to participate in my study. Your participation will involve responding to questions on a brief survey, which should not take more than more than 5-10 minutes to complete.

There are no anticipated significant risks associated with participation in this study. Potential participants may decline participation in this study.

Benefits of participating in this research study include contributing to the pool of knowledge on this topic and helping professionals learn how to better address the issue of bullying. There is no other compensation for participating in the study.

Confidentiality of participants will be protected by collecting surveys in such a way that anonymity is ensured.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Participating or declining to participate will not impact your relationship with me or with Providence College.

Returning a completed survey indicates that you have read and understood the above information and that you have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, your participation, and your rights and that you agree to participate in the study.

Thank you for participating in this research study.

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Appendix B

Teacher Survey

Demographic Information:

Race_____

Gender_____

Age_____

Number of years teaching_____

Number of years at this school_____

Subjects currently teaching_____

Please circle your answer below.

1. I observe bullying in my classroom.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. I consider behaviors other than physical and/or verbal assault to be bullying.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Please describe any other behaviors you consider to be bullying.

_____

4. I observe bullying behaviors in the hallways between classes.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. I observe bullying behaviors in the cafeteria during lunch.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. The bullying I observe is more indirect (i.e. spreading rumors, deliberate exclusion) than direct (i.e. name calling).

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. The bullying I observe is more verbal than physical.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Victims of the bullying I observe tend to be unpopular, passive, depressed, and have low self-esteem.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. Bullies that I know of tend to be popular, confident, and mentally healthy.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. I observe more bullying among female students than male students.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. I know of students who are both bullies and victims of bullying.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. Students report bullying to teachers and other adults in the building.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. When I witness bullying I intervene.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. Please describe how you intervene when witnessing bullying.

_____

15. I refer bullies and victims to the school social worker and/or psychologist when I intervene.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. School staff has been provided with adequate anti-bullying training.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix C

Guiding questions for teacher interviews

1. Please tell about your experiences with bullying.

2. Please describe the types of bullying you observe both inside and outside your classroom.

3. Are there any differences in bullying behaviors between male and female students?

4. In your experience, how frequently do students report bullying? Who reports it, victims or students who have witnessed the bullying?

5. Have you noticed common characteristics of student who bully peers?

6. Have you noticed common characteristics of students who are victims of bullying?

7. Please describe how you intervene upon observing bullying among students. If you do not intervene, please explain why.

8. Please describe the academic achievements of both chronic bullies and victims of bullying.

9. What types of anti-bullying training have staff at the school been provided with?

Appendix D

Guiding Questions for school social worker interview

1. Please tell me about your experiences with bullying.

2. How often do victims of bullying come to you to discuss what is going on with them?

3. Do you work with actual bullies very often?

4. Have you found that some students are both bullies and victims (bully-victims) at certain times?

5. If you have noticed common characteristics of bullies, please describe them.

6. If you have noticed common characteristics of victims, please describe them.

7. Please describe any mental health and/or substance abuse problems you have noticed among victims.

8. Please describe any mental health and/or substance abuse problems you have noticed among bullies.

9. Do bullies and/or victims tend to come from difficult family backgrounds?

10. Do you and/or the school psychologist offer any groups for students who are dealing with bullying?