



Vol. 1, No. 1, 2014

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Prevalence of bullying in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for children with and without mild disabilities: A comparison study

ABSTRACT. This investigation examined perceptions of bullying for students with ($n = 15$) and without ($n = 60$) mild disabilities in grades 4th, 5th, and 6th in a school district in the state of California in the United States of America. Specifically, the following questions were investigated: 1) Do students with disabilities perceive a higher prevalence of being bullied than students without disabilities? 2) When different disability groups are compared, how do they rate the amount of bullying experienced? 3) How do students who have been bullied rate school enjoyment when compared to students who have not been bullied? and 4) Do significant differences emerge between students who have and have not been bullied on their ratings of the amount of friends? Notably, no significant differences emerged between the groups. These findings are striking in light of past research. The discussion will explore implications related to the study findings, including potential protective mechanisms that reduced the participants' exposure to bullying.

KEYWORDS: bullying, disability, mild disabilities

Prevalence of Bullying

The topic of bullying is gaining widespread attention in the field of education and in American culture at large (Good, Macintosh & Gietz, 2011). Parents are increasingly concerned about the effects of bullying on their children and the school climate (Dyer & Teggart, 2007). The increased focus on bullying and its effects provide school administrators with further incentive to create school cultures free from bullying including the idea that districts offering open enrollment will be more attractive if a positive school environment is present (Holzbauer, 2008). Furthermore, research has documented connections between bullying and academic achievement, namely that poorer academic performance

is linked to higher rates of bullying, indicating that districts would be well served to actively reduce bullying in the schools (Mishna, 2003). In response to the concerns from American culture at large, educational professionals, and parental concerns, many schools are indeed starting programs to reduce the amount of bullying on their campuses (Flynt & Morton, 2001).

Prior research investigating bullying found that characteristics common to children with learning disability (LD) put them at increased risk of being a victim of a bully (Mishna, 2003). Children and youth with LD reported more symptoms of depression, anxiety and greater loneliness (Heath, 1992; San Miguel *et al.*, 1996; Svetaz, Ireland, & Blum, 2000). When the prevalence of bullying for adolescents was examined, Whitney, Nabuzoka, and Smith (1992) found that students with disabilities have a greater likelihood of being bullied than their peers without disabilities. These findings are troubling as students who experience bullying have been shown to evoke a number of emotional states including anger, frustration, sadness, anxiety and guilt (Menesini, Codecasa, Benelli, & Cowie, 2003). It is important to understand the frequency and type of bullying students with disabilities encounter in comparison to their peers without disability. Gaining knowledge on student perceptions of the prevalence and type of bullying will help inform interventions that aim to reduce bullying in the schools.

Investigating student perceptions of bullying is important due to the amount of stress a student is under when in a "bullying situation." Cognitive Load Theory is the idea that our working memory is limited with respect to the amount of information it can hold, and the number of operations it can perform on that information (Van Gerven, Paas, Van Merriboer, & Schmidt, 2002). This theory would then suggest that students who are under cognitive stress have difficulty performing well in school. Students with disabilities such as LD or ADHD may experience stressors related to having a disability that are compounded by experiencing bullying.

Defining the Victim and the Bully

Several criteria must be met in order to identify an interaction as bullying. Flynt and Morton (2001) found that an interaction is defined as bullying if it (1) occurs over time, (2) has an intent to harass and cause

harm, and (3) displays an imbalance between the individuals involved. Definitions of the term "victim" are not as developed. One definition describes victimization as encompassing any person or group of people being harassed (Flynt & Morton, 2001).

Research defining a victim of bullying typically focused on the characteristics of the bully and the victim (Olweus, 2001; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). Generally, victim characteristics were defined as low self-esteem, lack of social awareness, shyness, and help-seeking behaviors. Typical characteristics of being a bully were hyperactivity, aggressiveness, and behavior problems (Nabuzoka, 2003). Flynt and Morton (2001) suggested that children with Intellectual Disability (ID) were candidates of bullying because they tended to have low self-esteem, a lack of social awareness, and looked to others for guidance. These authors also stated that children with Emotional Disorder (ED) were most likely to be bullies because of aggressive behavior. However, the students with ED who were anxious, withdrawn, depressed, or had low self-esteem could also be victims of harassment (Flynt & Morton, 2001). Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) found correlations between certain characteristics that seem to define a bully and a victim. Bullies exhibited violent behavior and hyperactivity. Victims displayed emotional and interpersonal problems. In addition, higher levels of challenging behaviors such as tantrums, lying, and stealing were displayed in both the victim and the bully (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). According to Mishna (2003), children with LD are at risk for victimization due to poor social/relationship skills, low self-esteem, and the stigma associated with the disability. Also, children with LD typically report more symptoms of depression and loneliness. Consequently, rejection by their peers leaves students with LD unprotected and susceptible to further victimization (Mishna, 2003). Nabuzoka (2003) reported that peers significantly associated being a victim of bullying with shy and help-seeking behaviors as well as associated bullies with disruptions or starting fights (Nabuzoka, 2003). In a study centered in 5th grade classrooms, Estelle, Farmer, Irvin, Crowther, Akos, and Boudah (2009) found that students with mild disabilities who had aggressive and perceived-popular associates had more peer nominations for bullying than all others and social isolates were more likely to be labeled as being bullied.

Students who Act as Bullies and Experience Victimization

When thinking about who is usually a bully and who is usually victimized, there are certain preconceived notions and stereotypes that come up. One may think that the “stronger” personality would bully and the “weaker” personality may be a victim. However, some research indicates that may not necessarily be the case. For example, Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) suggest that nearly all special education students are victims and even those considered bullies are victims outside of school. Children with learning disabilities can be both bully and bullied due to having lower self-esteem and experiencing more behavior problems than non-disabled peers (Flynt & Morton, 2001). In fact, Mishna (2003) found that all special education students reported being victims of some form of bullying either at school or at home, and being bullies themselves. According to Estelle et al. (2009), students with disabilities were more likely to be perceived as being bullies by both teachers and peers. Teachers also rated students with mild disabilities as encountering significantly higher instances of bullying when compared to typical peers (Estelle et al., 2009).

Another study examined teacher and student perceptions in relation to student characteristics associated with bullying. Nabuzoka (2003), using a sample of both children with LD and typical peers, found that teachers associated the same type of characteristics (uncooperative, disruptive, starts fights) with victims and bullies. Interestingly enough, peers did not have that same association. The peers associated being a victim of bullying with only shy and help-seeking behaviors. The researcher concluded that teachers may be more inclined to consider victims as perpetrators as well (Nabuzoka, 2003). Some research also suggests that children and youth with exceptionalities are more vulnerable to victimization by peers and may also be more likely to bully others (Cummings, Pepler, Mishna, & Craig, 2006). Recent studies have also examined the need for bystander training and intervention. A 2012 meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs indicated that increased bystander intervention had a significant affect on the success of the anti-bullying program (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Based these findings, one can conclude that both the victim and the bully may need social behavior strategies and interventions, as well as the bystanders. Social skills may be an effective tool to include in intervention programs aimed at decreasing bullying and victimization (Raskaus-

kas & Modell, 2011). The research also implies that teachers and staff need training in the characteristics of bullying and social interventions as well.

Interventions to Decrease Bullying

Interventions to reduce bullying were very similar as they all exhibited a focus on social skills and assertiveness, adequate training and implementation, and overall awareness (Dyer & Teggart, 2007; Flynt & Morton, 2001; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). The most common suggestion for decreasing bullying is school programs such as character education, social skills, and peer established rules (Flynt & Morton, 2001). Dyer and Teggart (2007) suggest interventions imbed topics such as social skills and assertiveness training, coping strategies, and teacher support. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to empowering students with disabilities, encouraging them to open up about bullying, and giving them awareness of what it is to be victimized by bullies (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). Finally, the attitudes of school staff in regard to behavior problems impacts the rates of bullying. Specifically, schools with staff that are willing to manage behavior problems experienced lower incidences of bullying (Lee, Buckthorpe, Craighead, & McCormack, 2008). In all, interventions need to be preventative with strategies for students with disabilities and typical students to be able to build healthy social skills and creative positive relationships that can generalize from school to home environment.

Conclusions from the literature

The research tends to have consensus on needed content in bullying intervention programs, definitions related to a bully and a victim, and that children with disabilities can be both the bully and/or the victim (Dyer & Teggart, 2007; Flynt & Morton, 2001; Holzbauer, 2008; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). Furthermore, the lack of training for educators on reducing bullying was widely found (Lee, Buckthorpe, Craighead, & McCormack, 2008). From the limited research in comparisons on bullying between students with disabilities

and typically developing peers, one might conclude that students with disabilities are more likely to bully and be bullied (Mishna, 2003). However, it is wise to consider what factors related to this trend. Cummings (2006) suggested that without supportive relationships with peers and adults, children and youth who have physical, learning, intellectual or emotional disabilities may be less able to achieve important developmental tasks and a full quality of life. In addition, Estelle *et.al.* (2009) suggested that the late elementary school years are a time when social dynamics may be particularly important to bullying and victimization. In a study investigating the effectiveness of an anti-bullying program on peers in grades 4-6, Williford et al. (2012) found that the program curriculum, which included all students (victims, bullies and bystanders), reduced student' internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression, and improved peer perceptions. Therefore it is imperative that special educators think about the social aspects of development when writing individual education plans as well as academics. Rauskauskas and Modell (2011) indicated that a "whole school" approach to bullying intervention was required for successful implementation, yet students with disabilities had not been included in many programs or studies to this point. The interventions mentioned in the research done by Dyer and Teggart (2007), Flynt and Morton (2001), and Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) are systematic, preventative, school-wide, and filled with coping and social skills strategies. Holzbauer (2008) puts it into perspective when stating that the awareness of disability harassment needs to reach the same level of validation, prevention and intervention that has taken place for other legally protected classes such as groups concerned with racial and sexual harassment. The inclusion of students with disabilities in bullying programs is critical to address the "whole school" approach recommended for implementation (Raskauskas & Modell, 2011).

Gaps in the Literature

While the issue of bullying is addressed in various research articles for children without disabilities (Olweus, 2001), there is only a small amount of research documenting bullying for students with disabilities (Dyer & Teggart, 2007; Flynt & Morton, 2001; Holzbauer, 2008; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). Several

issues underlie current research as it relates to bullying and disability. First, disability type is not specified. Some research has specifically investigated mental retardation (now referred to as intellectual disability), ED (Dyer & Teggart, 2007), or LD (Mishna, 2003), but most investigators use the generic term "disability" and decline to describe their participants' disabilities in specific terms. Second, many investigations that have focused on disability did not include a comparison group of peers without disability. Third, the samples were skewed toward children with special needs only. For example, Reiter and Lefler's (2007) sample was taken only from two special education schools and Dyer and Teggart (2007) only used a small sample of CAMHS (mental health) service-users. Holzbauer (2008) only interviewed special education teachers. More research is needed within the comparison of bullying between children with disabilities and typical-developing students.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to provide a specific lens on the actual bullying practices that are occurring in 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students in an elementary school setting. Prior research indicates that students with disabilities are at a greater risk of being bullied than students without disabilities (Mishna, 2003), however, little is known about the prevalence of bullying for children diagnosed specifically with learning disabilities. The current investigation is unique in that it involves students with mild disabilities categorized as Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Sensory Integration Disorder, and Emotional Disturbance (with Oppositional Defiance and Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder) and compares the experiences of bullying with same-aged peers without disabilities. The following questions were addressed: 1) Do students with disabilities perceive a higher prevalence of being bullied than students without disabilities? 2) When different disability groups are compared, how do they rate the amount of bullying experienced? 3) How do students who have been bullied rate school enjoyment when compared to students who have not been bullied? and 4) Do significant differences emerge between students who have and have not been bullied on their ratings of the amount of friends?

Method

Participants

This study examined the perceptions of 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students between the ages of 9-12 years old from an elementary school in the Fullerton School District. This school is located in a middle class socioeconomic area in Southern California. There were approximately 85 total participants, 15 with a disability and 60 without a disability. Of the total sample, 56 students were in 4th grade, 25 were in 5th grade and 5 were in 6th grade. The disabilities represented were ADHD (n = 5), LD (n = 5), ED (with ODD and OCD) (n = 3), and Sensory Integration (n = 2). Participants were 4th, 5th or 6th grade students from seven upper grade classrooms at one school. All students with disabilities were fully included in a general education classroom for all or part of the school day.

When asked about their gender, 36 students reported "male" and 49 students reported "female." When asked which race best describes them, the students rated themselves as follows: 40% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 2% Native American, .05% African American, and 12.95% marked "Other." As shown in Table 1, participants were split into two groups composed of students with and without disabilities. Of the 15 students with disabilities, the majority were in 4th grade (80%), were males (73%) and had Caucasian descent (46.5%). The students without disabilities (n = 60), were mainly in the 4th grade and of Caucasian descent (34%), however the majority of these participants were female (66%).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographics	Students with Disabilities (n = 15)		Students without Disabilities (n = 60)	
	n	%	n	%
Grade				
4th	12	80	34	63
5th	2	13	22	31
6th	1	7	4	6
Gender: boys	11	73	35	34
Race: white, non-Hispanic	7	46.5	19	34.3

Setting

Participants completed a paper-based survey in the school library or their general education classroom setting, depending on teacher preference, participant comfort ability, and size of the group. The setting was quite, comfortable and safe. Students took the surveys in groups of 7-10 and were spread throughout the room to avoid any uncomfortable situations and provide privacy.

Instruments

The participants were given a 16-question survey containing Likert-scale ratings, multiple choice and open-ended short answer questions. Participants were asked about demographics (age, gender, race), how many friends they had, how they felt about school, the frequency of different types of bullying, whether they told anyone about the bullying, whether they bullied others, and what teachers should do about bullying. The survey included a short definition of bullying and a description of the types of bullying the student would be asked to respond to. The definition read, "Bullying is defined as 'doing something to hurt someone else, repeatedly, over a period of time.' For the purpose of this survey, we will define 'hurting someone else' as: 1) saying mean and hurtful things, being made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way; 2) completely ignoring or excluding someone from a group or leaving someone out on purpose; 3) hitting, kicking, pushing or shoving someone around; and 4) telling lies, spreading false rumors, or sending mean notes about someone." The examiner stayed in the room with the participants to answer any questions while completing the survey. Each survey was labeled with an SID number to ensure anonymity when completing the surveys. When completed, the surveys were locked in a cabinet in the examiner's office to ensure privacy.

Data Collection Procedures

Recruitment of participants was done at a single elementary school in Fullerton, California by convenience sampling. All participants were minors, so consent was needed. Consent letters, as shown in Appendix B, were sent home to parents of potential participants in student back-

packs and those who were interested in participating sent the signed form back in their child's backpack or contacted the researcher via email or phone. During this initial contact, the researcher answered any questions about the study. Once the parent consent letters were returned and all questions were answered, all students with parent consent were given an assent form. The assent form was explained to the student by the researcher to assure understanding and any questions about the study were answered at that time. If the student agreed to participate, the student signed the assent form. The school principal also signed a consent letter and approved the survey.

During administration, the facilitator, a credentialed resource specialist, briefly explained the purpose of the study and reiterated the definition of bullying as it appeared on the survey. It was explained that any participant could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The facilitator checked for understanding, answered any questions, and distributed the survey. The facilitator was available to privately answer questions as the survey was completed. Approximately 10-15 minutes was given to complete the survey. Participants were allowed to finish if they choose to after the time allotted. Upon completion, the facilitator collected the survey and secured all materials in a locked cabinet to insure privacy.

The participants were told not to include their name anywhere on the survey. Each participant was assigned a subject identification number (SID) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All surveys were labeled using the SID and the facilitator distributed the surveys accordingly during the data collection.

After the surveys were completed and collected, the data was compiled by hand and entered into a statistics computer program (SPSS). Data survey statistics were tallied and scores between students with disability and students without disability were compared. T-tests were run on mean comparisons between the two independent variables and the prevalence of bullying. Open-ended questions were compared and tallied by hand to include in the discussion section.

Results

Four types of analyses were conducted. Mean comparisons using T-tests were computed in order to examine the relationship between students with disability and students without a disability concerning

their perceptions of bullying using these research questions; 1) Is there a difference between typical students and students with disability on the perceptions of bullying incidences? 2) How did different disability groups rate the incidence of bullying they experienced? 3) Do significant differences emerge between students who have and have not been bullied on their ratings of school enjoyment? and 4) Do significant differences emerge between students who have and have not been bullied on their ratings of the amount of friends?

Student Perceptions on the Incidences of Bullying

A paired samples t test was calculated to compare independent variables (students with and without disability, $n = 85$) regarding bullying. The bullied variable measured the number of bullying experiences within the last month. As shown in Table 2, the mean for students with disability was 1.4 ($SD = .632$) and the mean for students without disability was 1.3 ($SD = .557$). No significant difference between the two groups was found $t(2) = .440, p > .05$. Students with and without disabilities rated the amount of bullying they encountered on a monthly basis as similar.

Table 2

Student Perceptions on the Incidences of Bullying

Question	Students With Disabilities	Students Without Disabilities	<i>t</i>
Perceptions on the incidences of bullying in one month	1.4 (0.63)	1.3 (0.56)	$t = 0.44$

Amount of Bullying Between Different Types of Disability

Percentages between the students with different types of disability were compared. Students with Learning Disabilities composed 33% of the participants ($n = 5$), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder composed another 33% ($n = 5$), Sensory Integration Disorder was 13% ($n = 2$), and Emotional Disturbance (with Oppositional Defiance and Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder) was 20% of the sample ($n = 3$), were computed to examine the disability groups and the amount of bullying they

had experienced in the past month. Due to the small sample sizes of the disability groups, percentages of the incidences of bullying were reported rather than comparing mean results. Overall, 67% of the students with disability reported they had been bullied in the past month. As seen in Table 3, of those students with disabilities that reported being bullied, 80% had LD, 60% had ADHD, 67% had E.D., and 50% had Sensory Integration. Although the students with Learning Disability had the highest percentage of bullying incidences, there were more students with this type of disability in the sample.

Table 3

Amount of Bullying Between Different Types of Disability

Disability Type (n)	Bullied (%)	Not Bullied (%)
ED (n = 3)	67	33
LD (n = 5)	80	20
ADHD (n = 5)	60	40
Sensory Integration (n = 2)	50	50

Ratings of School Enjoyment Between Students who were and were not Bullied

The third question of this investigation examined whether significant differences emerged between ratings of school enjoyment for students with and without disabilities in public school settings. Of the students who were not bullied, 0% marked that they disliked school and 8% marked that they neither liked nor disliked school. Of the students who were bullied, 6% marked that they disliked school and 15% marked that they neither liked nor disliked school. 92% of the students who were not bullied stated that they liked school. Of the students that were bullied in the last month, 78% stated that they liked school. As shown in Table 4,

Table 4

Ratings of School Enjoyment Between Student who were and were not Bullied

Question	Students who were bullied	Students who were not bullied	<i>t</i>
Ratings of school enjoyment	4.05 (0.93)	4.23 (0.58)	<i>t</i> = 0.82

the mean score on school enjoyment for students who experienced bullying was 4.05 (SD = .93) and the mean score for students who were not bullied was 4.23 (SD = .58). An independent samples t-test was conducted and found that no significant differences existed between the two groups on their ratings of school enjoyment, $t(2) = .819, p > .05$.

Ratings of the Amount of Friends Between Student who were and were not Bullied

The final question addressed student ratings on the amount of friends for students who experienced and did not experience bullying. 20% of the students who were bullied marked that they had only 0-3 friends, compared to the 12% of the students who were not bullied. Of the students who were not bullied, 88% marked that they had 4 or more friends. Specifically, the questions asked if significant differences emerged between ratings on the amount of friends for students who were and were not bullied. An independent samples t-test was conducted and the results (as shown in Table 5) indicate that no significant differences emerged on number of friend ratings for students who were bullied ($M = 3.4, SD = 0.98$) and students who were not bullied ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.98$), $t(2) = .16, p > .05$.

Table 5

Ratings of the Amount of Friends Between Student who were and were not Bullied

Question	Students who were bullied	Students who were not bullied	<i>t</i>
Ratings of the amount of friends	3.4 (0.98)	3.5 (0.98)	$t = 0.16$

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study indicated no significant differences were found between the perceptions of bullying incidences that occurred during a month time frame for students with and without disability. In addition, the results indicated that there were no significant differences in the amount of bullying between the different disabilities represented in this sample population. This research differs from other studies examined in the literature in several ways (Dyer & Teggart, 2007, Flynt

& Morton, 2001, Holzbauer, 2008, Mishna 2003, Nabuzoka, 2003, Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). First, the disabilities represented in this study were in the mild-moderate category. This sample contained no Physical Impairment, Intellectual Development or Down Syndrome diagnoses. Some research shows that students with mild-moderate disabilities may not be targeted for bullying as much as students with a categorization of "moderate" (Flynt & Morton, 2001; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Another reason this study differs from previous research may be that this study focused only on only one public, general education school. Reiter and Lefler (2007) used two special education schools in their sample and the results indicated that students in special education were bullied significantly more than students in the general education schools. This school is in a middle-class socioeconomic area with ample parent involvement, which may provide a protective layer to on-campus bullying. In addition, the participants in this investigation were different from other literature examining bullying in that all students with disabilities were included in the general education environment for all or part of their school day. No one participated in a special day classroom, thus, were not viewed as being in "special education" to the extent a child segregated into a special day class would be. The following discussion examines study results and explores implications this research has for student perceptions and self-concept, inclusion, and anti-bullying intervention.

Perceptions and self-concept

When comparing the group of students who had been bullied to the group of students who had not been bullied in the past month (both of which included students with disability), these results indicated that students with and without disability rated the amount of bullying they encountered similarly in addition to the amount of friends and how much they enjoyed school. Two potential explanations for these findings could be the small sample size and characteristics associated with the school location of the participants.

While studying self-concept and victimization, Kaukiainen (2002) found that adolescents who were bullied scored especially low on social self-concept. In this study, the students who reported being bullied within the past month reported that they disliked school and didn't have many friends. While one may rightly assume that feelings toward school

and prevalence of bullying were negatively correlated, perhaps students who are engaged in a positive school environment feel more happy about school and are, thus, less likely to enact bullying behaviors, including to students with disability. Since the sample mostly indicated they enjoyed school, it is possible the participants at this school site were less likely to encounter bullying overall based on the school characteristics. This finding has implications for an intervention approach to bullying. Teachers and administrators who create positive school environments may encounter more students who enjoy attending schools, thus, reducing the amount of bullying that occurs.

Inclusion

Students with and without disabilities rated themselves similarly on the prevalence of bullying they encountered. Out of the 85 total participants in this sample (including students with disabilities), 71% said that they had been bullied at least one time during the past month. Fifty eight percent of the students without disabilities said they had been bullied in the past month. When only the perceptions of students with disability were examined, 67% reported being bullied in the past month. In comparison, 33% of students with disability and 29% of students without disability reported not being bullied.

One may surmise that the inclusive educational setting contributed to the similar rates of bullying in students with and without disabilities. Students with disabilities were educated in general education classrooms versus segregated classrooms where it is easier to be labeled as a student with a disability. In addition, all students were educated together and received the same whole school behavior expectations and systems. When researching students with disabilities and their involvement in anti-bullying programs, Rauskauskas and Modell (2011) found that 55% of students with mild learning disabilities and 78% of students with moderate learning disabilities experienced bullying. They also found that students in special day classes were bullied more often than those students in inclusive settings. When reported bullying and specific disability groups were examined, percentage ratings between groups showed similar ratings on the perceived prevalence of bullying. An explanation for these results could be that the students with disabilities included in this sample have mild-moderate types of disabilities and are included in general education for either part or all of their school day.

Intervention

The large percentage (71%) of all the students in the sample who indicated experiencing bullying at least one time in the past month would imply that any bullying intervention program implemented at this school should be geared toward all students, including students with disabilities. Given the negative outcomes for all students, especially those with exceptionalities, reducing the prevalence of bullying should be an important goal for schools (Good, Macintosh, & Gietz, 2011). According to Rauskauskas and Modell (2011), many existing anti-bullying programs have largely ignored students with disabilities as being important participants in the whole-school approach. This problem can be rectified by modifying existing programs to include students with disabilities in assessment and delivery of program content. Just as educators modify grade level curriculum, these anti-bullying programs can be easily modified as well. The inclusion of students with disabilities in bullying programs is critical in order to truly address the whole-school approach recommended to address the issue of bullying (Rauskauskas & Modell, 2011). Other researchers also agree in the same approach to intervention. Dyer and Teggart (2007), Flynt and Morton (2001), and Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) report that intervention should be systematic, preventative, school-wide, and filled with coping and social skills strategies.

One intervention approach mentioned in the research by Good, Macintosh and Gietz, 2011, is connecting an anti-bullying program with the School-Wide Positive Behavior Support program (SWPBS: Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2008). The goal of SWPBIS is to develop a safe, positive, and consistent school culture. Although this program supports all students and staff, students receiving special education services may benefit the most, especially when inclusion is a school goal (Good et al. 2011). The focus on a consistent set of behavior expectations for all students would seem to allow for a more inclusive environment. In this research, Good et al. (2011) found that students in special education who were included in the implementation of SWPBS received a more consistent and predictable environment across all settings, making it easier for students to feel safe and receive behavior supports in the general education environment. In this study, a school-wide intervention program resulted in fewer incidents of both bullying and victimization for students in special education (Good et al., 2011).

Recommendations for future research could include schools with more diversity, including greater variability in socioeconomic status. Furthermore, additional data collection in multiple educational placements, such as general education, mild/moderate, and moderate/severe would be beneficial. Researchers should investigate specific school factors that contribute to a positive school climate with low student reported rates of bullying.

Students with disabilities have the right to learn in a safe environment (Rauskauskas & Modell, 2011). Although prior investigations indicated that students with disabilities are at a greater risk of being bullied than students without disabilities (Mishna 2003), this study found no significant differences between the perceptions of bullying incidences between students with and without mild disabilities. Although the explanation for these findings could be due to the types of disabilities investigated or the size and type of demographics of the sample population, the findings point to the need for a whole school approach when implementing any type of anti-bullying program. Students with disabilities are part of our schools and need to be included in the planning and implementation of any programs that make schools a better place to grow and learn. Every student deserves to learn in a safe and positive environment.

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