

A Bullying Update

The act of bullying is a form of aggression that typically involves a power imbalance between a perpetrator and a victim. Bullying has many dire consequences including problems with psychosocial adjustment for both bullies and victims, increases in mental health problems for both parties, and deteriorations in school climate/connectedness (see the Center's Quick Find on Bullying for links to in-depth discussions <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/uf/bully.htm>).

In 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics released a new Web Tables Report entitled *Student Reports of Bullying: Results from the 2017 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey*. This resource covers student bullying reports with respect to student sex, race/ethnicity, grade, and household income, as well as the characteristics of the schools they attend. Key findings from the report are:

- In 2017, approximately 20 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied at school. Of these students, 13 percent reported that they were made fun of, called names, or insulted; another 13 percent reported being the subject of rumors; 4 percent reported that they were threatened with harm; 5 percent reported that they were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; 2 percent reported that others tried to make them do things they did not want to do; 5 percent reported that they were excluded from activities on purpose; and 1 percent reported that their property was destroyed by others on purpose.
- Seventeen percent of male students and 24 percent of female students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied.
- Of the 20 percent of students ages 12 through 18 who reported being bullied, 24 percent reported being bullied once, 17 percent reported being bullied on 2 days, 30 percent reported being bullied on 3 to 10 days, and 20 percent reported being bullied on more than 10 days.
- Forty-one percent of these students also reported that they believed the bullying would happen again, and 33 percent reported being bullied by multiple students acting as a team, or acting both alone and as a team.

Predictors of Bullying

Fink and colleagues (2018) suggest that school climate and connectedness and "school deprivation" are major predictors of school bullying. They operationalize school climate as "the extent to which students on average feel connected to their school and have positive perceptions of school" and school deprivation as "the proportion of deprived children in the school."

Bullying Prevention Programs

In 2019, Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi reported on the effectiveness of school-bullying intervention programs globally. Their meta-analysis included 100 independent evaluations. They state that:

Overall, programs were effective in reducing school-bullying perpetration and victimization. In the present paper, we focused on 12 countries (e.g., Italy, Norway, USA, UK), three regions (i.e., Europe, North America, and Scandinavia) and four anti-bullying programs (i.e., KiVa, NoTrap!, OBPP, and ViSC) with multiple evaluations. Our results showed that anti-bullying programs evaluated in Greece were the most effective in reducing bullying perpetration, followed by Spain and Norway. Anti-bullying programs evaluated in Italy were the most effective in reducing

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bullying victimization, followed by Spain and Norway. Evaluations conducted in North America were the most effective in reducing bullying perpetration, and evaluations conducted in Scandinavia were the most effective in reducing bullying victimization. Evaluations of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program produced the largest effect sizes for bullying perpetration outcomes, but the NoTrap! Program was the most effective in reducing bullying victimization. We also systematically review the core components of the intervention programs and make recommendations for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

A Few Examples of Programs Reviewed by Gaffney and Colleagues

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) – OBPP differs from other programs by not directly targeting bullying behavior. It focuses on promoting warmth and positivity among peers and involves students, parents, teachers, and other members of the community. It also directly targets students already at risk of bullying or being bullied.

NoTrap! – a web-based program where students act as moderators for an anti-bullying forum. Allows students to actively engage with other students regarding bullying, and it encourages students to ask questions and participate in the forum.

KiVa – an anti-bullying program developed in Finland in 2007 that uses various shared activities between the students to foster a sense of community, and it includes disciplinary actions for the act of bullying, teacher training, and playground supervision. The program specifically targets bystanders in order to raise awareness for different bullying behaviors that someone might witness.

Other programs have been implemented in schools such as No Bully and Operation Respect, but given the cultural differences in schools, the above focus on programs replicated in different communities in the United States and Western Europe is of special interest.

Beyond Piecemeal Approaches

Everybody agrees that school bullying is a major problem, but considerable controversy exists over the best way to address the problem. The above brief information highlights the continuing tendency to pursue piecemeal policy and practice initiatives.

Our Center proposes that it is time to move away from stand-alone programs for addressing problems such as bullying and other specific types of problems manifested by students. Such programs add to the marginalized, fragmented, and piecemeal approach to student and learning supports that has dominated schools for far too long.

Rather than pursuing one more discrete program focused on a specific concern, it is essential to use each concern that rises to a high policy level as an opportunity to catalyze and leverage systemic change. The aim must be on taking another step toward transforming how schools go about ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. This involves unifying and developing a comprehensive and equitable system of interventions for addressing the full range of barriers to learning and teaching and for re-engaging disconnected students (see Adelman & Taylor, 2017, 2018; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011).

Addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students is a school improvement imperative. Developing and implementing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of student and learning supports is the next evolutionary stage in meeting this imperative. It is the missing component in efforts to close the opportunity and achievement gaps, enhance school safety, reduce dropout rates, shut down the pipeline from schools to prisons, and promote well-being and social justice.

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