TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF BULLYING
AND THEIR ANTI-BULLYING ATTITUDE

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Abstract:

It has been shown that bullying is a serious problem in schools. Teachers are the ones who play an important role in stopping bullying in schools. It is essential to understand what teachers know about bullying, what their attitude towards it is and how they implement the anti-bullying policy. The attitudes of teachers and the culture they nurture will influence which anti-bullying strategies they will use which can benefit the school. In this context, based on the literature review, this paper aims to present an overview of the research on teachers' knowledge of bullying and their anti-bullying attitude.

Keywords: bullying, victimization, teachers, anti-bullying, intervention

1. Introduction

All professionals, regardless of the field where they make their contribution, agree that the main purpose of teaching is to increase social capital and cognitive student development. This can be achieved when teachers play an essential role in promoting healthy relationship among students by dealing with bullying and applying anti-bullying strategies in the school environment.

Understanding bullying is considered to be very important because it affects how teachers face and respond to situations where students are exposed to bullying (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Madsen, 1996; Yoon, 2004). It would be important to understand the definition that the teachers have for bullying, since it is likely that they do not include incidents that they do not consider bullying (Boulton, 1997).

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Knowledge about the extent of bullying, its different types and age and gender differences regarding need to be part of teacher information. Less demanding examined ways as adults define bullying and its features. Madsen (1996) found that 78% of 80 teachers and parents determine that bullying hurts the victim, 23% perceive bullying as a pattern and 16% of them thought that interventions against bullying were a very important factor in its prevention.

On the other hand, Siann et al. (1993) in interviewing 20 teachers over their definition of bullying concluded that half of the teachers included imbalance in power between bully and victim.

In their quest for the views of teachers on bullying the researchers Siann, Callaghan, Lockhart, and Rawson (1993) came to the conclusion that uncertainty and subjective reaction of teachers to incidents of bullying were present in all the schools. Another study done by Boulton (1997) investigated the attitudes and beliefs of teachers about the skills that they should have to deal with bullying. The study found out that only threats and physical attacks were seen as acts of bullying, whereas bullying behaviors such as social exclusion and placement of nicknames were not seen as such.

Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) conducted a study with pre-service teachers to analyse how the types of bullying and characteristics teachers influenced their attitudes to bullying and interventions that they would undertake. These pre service teachers considered as the most serious assault and that required more intervention than verbal attacks and social exclusion. Moreover, if they had not seen any incidents themselves they did not report it, nor did they intervene in such cases. Pre-service teachers, who had a higher level of empathy, had more predisposition to identify and report bullying and that would intervene in situations like this.

Another study by Nicolaides, Toda, and Smith (2002) analysed pre-service teachers' beliefs, knowledge and skills in handling bullying in elementary schools, in carrying out an intervention program to reduce bullying and their ability to manage it. They were informed about the prevalence of bullying simply in the relevant state schools. Participants felt that bullies had low self-evaluation, lacked social skills, which is rejected by all the studies of recent years. According to these studies, bullies can be very skilled socially, the more successful manipulator of the social environment (Sutton, 1999).

Boulton (1997) has concluded that the way teachers understand exactly what bullying is, also determine how they perceive bullying incidents and take the decision to intervene or not. Adult relationship with a child affects the child management skills in many circumstances, especially in situations of bullying. Two integral parts of bullying are: inability of the victim to protect himself and others feel the obligation to

intervene when they realize that being trampled rights of the victim (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Olweus, 1996).

Jimerson, Swearer and Espelage (2008) estimate that at first, teachers must recognize that bullying happens in the classroom and at a high school, but often it is so hidden that it cannot be seen. Second, they must recognize that they need help and support specialist to determine those involved in bullying. Researchers have concluded that teachers are not able to determine with precision the victims (Holt & Keyes, 2004) and often overlook identification of bully victims. Third, teachers need to give up their sense of self-defence because researchers have estimated that bullying happens in most schools worldwide (Jimerson, Swearer and Espelage, 2008).

According to the study of Bauman and Del Rio's (2005) in the US, 39% of teachers believed that the pain caused on the bullied person was important in defining what bullying is, 28% felt that such was the imbalance of power and only 6% of them believed that repetition was the determining factor in defining of bullying. in Three different studies (Bauman & Del Rio, 2005; Sian et al., 1993; Stockdale et al., 2002) found that teachers believe bullying can be physical or psychological. More than half of 138 primary and secondary school participating in a study (Boulton, 1997) regarding the definition of physical and verbal bullying, estimated that social exclusion was not bullying. Over 25% of them felt that the distribution of rumours, seizure of others and embarrassment by staring at another, were acts of bullying. There is a mismatch in terms of the opinion that teachers hold regarding the prevalence of bullying, compared with the opinion of students, parents or other groups. Teachers and parents of students in the study of Stockdale et al. (2002) reported lower rates of bullying than students themselves.

2. Identification of bullying by teachers

Teachers may not fully understand the nature of bullying. Hazler et al. (1997) asked 14 experts in the field of bullying to analyze 70 features, finding the most representative ones to a bully and a victim. Experts assessed 19 typical features for a bully and 22 as typical for a victim, while 11 other features represented the biggest differences between them.

In their study, Carney et al. (2002) asked 209 teachers and 42 counsellors to identify the characteristics of a bully and a potential victim. Compared to the previous study, teachers and counsellors believed that the typical characteristics of a victim were limited (only 5). From these features, 15 were chosen as typical for a bully. Thus, teachers believed that bully and victim were more similar to each other than the experts themselves thought.

On the other hand, two groups of researchers assessed the ability of teachers to identify bully and actual victim among those who were in their classrooms. Paulk et al. (1999) compared the data obtained from teachers, peers and self-reporting by bullies and victims. 75% of students reported they had been involved in bullying, either as bullies or victims or bullying witnesses. Teachers, being more careful to identify bullies, reported ½ of the number of people who were self-reported as bullies, and as victims, they reported only 10% of total students that were self-reported as victims. Meanwhile, teachers failed to identify any bully - victim of those who were self-reported

Another important element in identifying bullying is the teacher's ability to tell the differences between the game and bullying. In their study of 251 teachers and counsellors, Hazler et al. (1997) asked them to determine, through the reading of different scenarios, which one was about bullying and which was not. Teachers easily defined physical bullying situations, but encountered difficulties in determining the relational bullying as well as distinguishing between the situations of the game among peers and bullying. They stressed that accurate identification of bullying was very important as long as this very moment (identifying bullying) determine whether school staff will intervene appropriately to prevent it.

3. Teachers' attitudes towards bullying

Teachers can do a great job in maintaining control of bullying in the classroom and therefore also of bullying in school (Holt & Keyes, 2004). Although the decision of students to share with another person an incident of bullying is determined by many factors, it is estimated that the attitude and the approach taken by the teacher is a key factor in the students' choice to put an to end to their victimization (Craig & Pepler, 1997). On the other hand, teachers' ability to deal with bullying and to prevent it has a lasting and important effect on their students' lives (Shur K., 2006).

Accurate identification of situations of bullying and the children involved in it are equally important, as are the attitudes and responses to bullying. In some countries, teachers assess bullying as an important and serious issue (Bauman & Del Rio, 2005; Gropper & Froschle, 2000; Nicolaides et al., 2002) In a study done by Harris and Willoughby (2003), teachers believed that bullying is hurtful to victims, both social exclusion and physical bullying. Some researchers have investigates the attitudes of teachers towards interventions against bullying. Teachers asked in studies by Nicolaides et al. (2002) and Bauman and Del Rio (2005), stated that they intervened in cases of bullying and helped managed to solve the problems successfully in their schools. Most teachers in the study of Boulton (1997) considered themselves responsible for the management of bullying in the classroom and in the school playground but not

responsible out of school. Teachers in the study of Harris and Willoughby's (2003) reported a higher dose of confidence in the fact that their colleagues will intervene in cases of bullying, whereas only 18% of them believed that intervention.

Regarding the confidence in being able to manage bullying, the study by Boulton (1997) stated that teachers judged themselves to be unable to intervene in bullying incidents, despite years of work or knowledge of the grade level they teach. New teachers in the studies by Nicolaides et al.'s (2002) and Bauman and Del Rio's (2005) reported high level of confidence in their abilities to manage bullying, but like experienced teachers, they felt that they needed special training.

When asked about the role of teachers in managing and preventing bullying students note that teachers generally do not take any steps to stop bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). In one study, Stephenson and Smith (1989) stated that, only 25% of students noted that teachers intervene in bullying situations while the rest reported that teachers do not intervene. Part of the justification of teachers for lack of intervention on their part were: uncertainty about how to interfere, the fact that there were witnesses to the incident, identifying the level of moderate bullying as typical children behaviour which does not involve any harm or consequences to the children (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig & Pepler, 1997

Emerging evidence indicates that individual teacher responses to bullying may be an important area to be included in investigations of students' bullying and victimization experiences. There is a great deal of variability among teachers in terms of their attitudes toward and perceptions of bullying (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Yoon & Kerber, in press). Stephenson and Smith (1989) found that 25% of teachers in their study reported that ignoring bullying behaviour was helpful, suggesting that some teachers are less willing to intervene. It is also possible that teachers are not fully aware of the extent to which bullying incidents affect students in school, and thus, they may not sufficiently intervene. In fact, they may not even intervene as much as they think they do. For example, Pepler et al. (1994) found that 85% of teachers reported intervening "always" or "often," whereas only 35% of students reported that teachers intervened in bullying incidents.

In their attempt to understand the perception and attitude of teachers towards bullying Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) concluded that empathy was the only trait that might predict the tendency of teachers to intervene in cases of bullying.

Yoon and Kerber (2003), Yoon (2004) and Bauman and Del Rio (2006) examined beliefs on the attitudes of teachers towards bullying and intervention strategies that they use in accordance with these views. Social exclusion is regarded as less important and less harmful than physical and verbal bullying and verbal. Based on this perception of bullying, teachers state that would interfere less in situations of social exclusion.

Physical bullying was also rated as more harmful than verbal bullying. Responses to social exclusion are limited to conversations with students, although most teachers stated that these incidents were better being ignored as irrelevant.

The degree of perceived seriousness of the damage that can be caused was the main factor that would determine whether teachers intervene to stop the incident, followed by empathy for the victim and self-efficacy to intervene. On the other hand, these three elements, failed to anticipate the extent of the real teacher interventions, when they were facing the situation of bullying.

4. Teacher's answer to bullying

One of the most important indicators of the success of intervention programs against bullying is the effectiveness of teachers in dealing with reported incidents by children who are victims of bullying or by their peers (Rigby and Bauman, 2004). According to Rigby and Barnes (2002), only 30% of children who are victims of bullying report their status as victim. As a result, teachers were left to engage only with a relatively small number of cases of bullying.

Smith and Shu (2000) offered some conclusions regarding the consequences of the intervention of teachers in cases of bullying reported by victims or classmates under which, generally, the action taken by the teacher stop bullying only in 27% of cases, while 28% of them had no change and deterioration of bullying to 16% of total reported cases.

In a study done in Japan by Kikkawa (1987) the majority of teachers stated that the most common intervention was: forcing bully to ask pardon to the victim. Conversations with the victim, the whole class discussions, conversations between bully and victim and punishment of bully were other types of interventions used by teachers. Some teachers in involved the school administration and the parents of the children involved in bullying in process of bullying management.

Bauman and Del Rio (2005) asked 82 teachers about the strategy they used towards children involved in bullying. According to findings of this study, the most used strategy was: children reported the incident to the teacher. Strategies also include reporting to parents, to avoid contacts with bully, stopping bully to continue the harassment and asking for help to friends. Bauman and Del Rio expressed concern that 40% of teachers recommended to victims to react against the bully and that 20% of teachers expressed that victims sometimes have simply to accept victimization.

Meanwhile, in the study of Harris and Willoughby (2003), teachers expressed the most common strategies of intervention that they used were patrolling the hallways of the school, notifying the parents of the parties involved in bullying and punishment of

bully. Only a few of them refer the bully and the victim to the counselling school office. About 75% of the teachers in this study were of the opinion that the person responsible for the management of bullying should be a vice director of the school.

It is common truth that teachers play an essential role in the application of a policy or program, so the success of bullying prevention depends largely on the teacher (Nicolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2002). Teachers should be properly trained to understand what bullying is, to change their perceptions and attitudes and learn the necessary skills to approach and manage this serious problem

In many cases, teachers and students hold different views related to bullying, which lead to different practical implications for both groups. Thus, teachers should be trained to recognise their perceptions and see that those may be inconsistent (Mishna et al., 2006).

As with any policy, an anti-bullying policy will be effective when teachers are aware of the potential harms of bullying, which last long and may ruin one's life forever. They must also understand their crucial role in this policy. If they recognize the importance of anti-bullying policies, then they will be able to use efficient intervention strategies. Kallestad & Olweus, (2003) emphasize that the key to success is for teachers seeing themselves as managers and actors of anti-bullying program.

Part of the problem is lack of proper training. Teachers state that they do not have the suitable training to deal with bullying; neither do they have the right resources (Mishna et al., 2005). Without proper training, policies and programs will be largely unsuccessful. For example, research on whole-school approaches has seen mixed results, but those results could be affected by inconsistency of implementation by teachers (Smith et al., 2004).

5. Conclusion

Bullying has become a serious issue that many schools of different level face today. It involves many students either as a victim, bully, or both. In this case, the teachers should play a better role in dealing with the problem. It is of paramount importance for teachers to change their perception of bullying, and its serious consequences on the person. In addition, they must change their attitude and use effective strategies in bullying management. Teachers should be properly trained and be provided with knowledge, tools and skills to deal with this problem.

In this delicate and difficult fight they must be able to identify bullying, both physical and psychological lone, and intervene successfully. This intervention is not just a conference student-parent. It takes time and patience. If teacher fail they will add to

the problem. The schools must set suitable programs to handle the problem, such as staff training, clear rules, and safe school environment.

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