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U.S. Teachers' and School Counsellors' Strategies for Handling School Bullying Incidents

Abstract

A sample of 735 U. S. teachers and school counsellors completed an online survey asking how likely they would be to use various strategies to respond to a hypothetical bullying incident. Analyses examined their use of five strategies: ignoring the incident, working with the bully, working with the victim, enlisting other adults, and disciplining the bully. Differences in mean scores based on these strategies were found by gender of participant, the presence or absence of school anti-bullying policies and programs, and previous anti-bullying training. Teachers and school counsellors differed on four of the five scale scores. Qualitative comment data add to the findings. Implications of the findings are discussed.

U.S. Teachers' and School Counsellors' Strategies for School Handling Bullying Incidents

Bullying in schools has been the subject of an ever-increasing body of research world-wide, with the U.S. entering the field later than researchers in other countries. Several studies have investigated the prevalence of bullying nationally or locally (e.g., DeVoe et al., 2004; Haynie, Nansel & Eitel, 2001; Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2003; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Swearer & Cary, 2003; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Other researchers have documented the consequences of bullying (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter 1995; Juvonen & Nishina, 2000; Leff, Power, & Goldstein, 2004; Marsh, Parada, Craven, & Finger, 2004; Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003; Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Rigby, 1996, 2003, Van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). The outcomes of various anti-bullying programs used in the U. S. have also been reported in the literature (e.g., Frey, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005; Juvonen & Graham, 2004); Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003; Samples, 2004; Twemlow et al., 2001.)

Much has been written about the importance of a whole school approach to countering bullying in schools (see Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1996; Smith & Sharp, 1994; Sullivan, 2000). This approach typically includes a range of components such as the development of an agreed anti-bullying policy, rigorous surveillance of playgrounds, curriculum activities to help develop constructive interpersonal attitudes and behavior, working closely with parents, and addressing cases of bullying appropriately and effectively if and when they occur. In this paper we are focusing specifically on what teachers do in addressing cases of bullying.

Evidence from a number of studies suggests that teachers are generally not very effective when they address cases of bullying. For example, in one U. S. study (Fekkes et al, 2005) among the 58% of children who had been bullied several times a week and actually

told a teacher about it, only 28% reported that the teacher was successful in stopping the bullying; 20% said the teacher tried to stop it to no effect, 10% said that the teacher tried to stop the bullying but it became worse, and 8% responded that the teacher did not try to stop the bullying. Similar evidence of teacher ineffectiveness in stopping bullying has been reported in England (Smith & Shu, 2002) and Australia (Rigby & Barnes, 2002).

Only a few studies have indicated what teachers do when they address cases of bullying. Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2003) surveyed 359 fourth year teachers and reported that when bullying occurred, a large majority (86%) of teachers engaged in serious talks with both bully and victim. These teachers listed as effective strategies contacting parents of the bullies and meeting with bullies, victims and parents to discuss the problem and generate solutions. Harris and Willoughby (2003) surveyed 68 teachers who were preparing to be administrators. Most of them (57%) endorsed automatic punishment for the bully, but many thought there should be an opportunity for counseling to be attempted before punishment was implemented. Contacting parents was also strongly endorsed. Less commonly mentioned were sending bullies to the office, talking with students about bullying and referring bullies to a counsellor. These two studies suggest that teachers use a variety of approaches in dealing with cases of bullying.

One limitation in both of these informative studies was that bullying was not defined, so that respondents' perceptions of the severity and type of bullying incident are likely to have varied. In addition, neither study included specifics about some of the interventions (e.g., what exactly constitutes a "serious discussion") and neither study had much to say about responses to the victim.

Along with teachers, school counsellors may take action in cases of bullying. It is possible that their professional training leads them to view bullying differently from teachers and to respond to cases of bullying in different ways. Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) found that

school counsellors displayed more empathy for victims of physical and relational bullying than teachers. They also perceived relational bullying to be more serious than teachers did, and were more likely to intervene in relational bullying. Finally, counsellors proposed more involved interventions for bullies in relational bullying. These findings suggest that school counsellors may be more perceptive and more sensitive to issues of bullying than teachers.

In the present study we sought to differentiate between the various ways in which both teachers and school counsellors prefer to tackle cases of bullying. Importantly, we were interested in the current state of practice, not in identifying best practice. Drawing upon earlier studies as well as the authors' experience consulting with teachers and counsellors (see Yoon & Kerber, 2003; Bauman & Del Rio, 2005), and proposals about how cases of bullying should be addressed, it was hypothesized that addressing cases of bullying in schools may be conceptualized as occurring along five relatively independent dimensions. These were (i) to ignore what was going on (see Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006), and Stephenson & Smith,1989); (ii) to discipline the bully, by applying sanctions, an approach consistent with the Olweus Anti-Bullying Program (Olweus, 1993); (iii) to work with the victim, especially in promoting a greater degree of assertiveness (see Field, 2007); (iv) seek help from others in dealing with the case, as exemplified by Koivisto (2004); and (v) to work primarily with the bully or bullies using a non-punitive problem-solving approach such as the No Blame Approach of Robinson and Maines (1997) and the Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 2002).

We were also interested in possible differences among school personnel in how they believed cases of bullying should be addressed related to (i) professional role (whether teacher or counsellor) (ii) gender (iii) the presence or absence of school anti-bullying policies and programs, and (iv) previous anti-bullying training. Finally, although the methodology adopted in this study was based upon the analysis of questionnaire responses to closed ended

questions contained in a Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ), supplementary data of a qualitative kind was also elicited to provide further information on teacher perspectives.

Method

Participants

A total of 735 U. S. teachers and school counsellors responded to the survey. The sample included at least one respondent from each of the 50 states. The ratio of male to female respondents in both teacher and counsellor samples was similar to that reported in the national population. Males represented 15% of the sample (n = 106) and females accounted for 85% (n = 613). Gender was missing for 6 respondents. This gender ratio approximates the national ratio of male to female teachers, reported to be 20/80 (Feller, 2006) and the gender distribution (85% female) of a sample of school counsellors described by Guess, Gillen, & Woitaszewski (2006). Membership in the national school counsellor association (ASCA) is 75% female (Andrew Woodward, personal communication, March 7, 2007). The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. In the U. S., most elementary schools include grades kindergarten through grades five or six (age 11-12), middle schools typically have grades six through eight and junior high schools have grades seven through nine. In most cases, with the exception of districts that have junior high schools with grade nine, students attend high school for four years, grades nine through 12, ages about 14 through 18.

Procedure

In order to reach a large sample and contain costs, the questionnaire was posted on a password-protected Internet site, and invitations to participate were distributed to teaching and school counselling listservs, email distributions lists, and via personal contacts. The decision to conduct the survey online was based on the benefits of internet surveys over traditional survey methods. Although surveys have lower response rates compared to

traditional mail surveys, the benefits of web surveys may outweigh the possibility of lower response rates. Internet surveys are beneficial because they require minimal (if any) expense, less time commitment, simplify data entry, and are relatively easy to execute (Dillman, 2000; Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Schonlan, Fricker, & Elliot, 2001). These experts recommended that web surveys use graphics infrequently, rarely "force" participants to answer questions, use passwords to access web surveys, and ensure confidentiality of responses (Granello & Wheaton; Schonlan et al.). These recommendations were followed when creating the web survey for the present study. Participants could skip questions and the site was password protected. A participant disclaimer was used to gain informed consent and explain participants' confidentiality. Of the 735 participants, 77% responded to an individual online invitation to complete the survey. Another 9% received a listserv message with the invitation, 8% learned of the survey on a website, and 4% read about the survey in a newsletter.

The scenario on which respondents were instructed to base their answers was as follows: *A 12-year old student is being repeatedly teased and called unpleasant names by another, more powerful, student who has successfully persuaded other students to avoid the targeted person as much as possible. As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and often isolated.* This scenario may be categorized as involving a moderate level of severity and to contain elements of both direct and indirect bullying.

Measure

The questionnaire used in this study was developed for this purpose from an earlier 26-item version devised by the second author that was piloted online with 278 educators from the U. S. and Australia. That questionnaire contained items intended to reflect the five dimensions described earlier. Following preliminary psychometric analysis of responses to that version, it was decided that modifications were needed to provide a factorial structure

that more clearly conformed to the hypothesized dimensions. Accordingly, some items were deleted and others reworded to create the current version.

This revised version consists of 22 items describing how the respondent might act in response to the case of bullying, described in the scenario given above. Response options used a 5-point scale, ranging from. 1 “I definitely would not”) and 5 (“I definitely would”). The mid-point rating (3) was labeled “I’m unsure.” The *HBQ* is provided in the Appendix, including the percentage of respondents selecting each response option. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire are described below.

Scale scores were calculated for each participant for use in subsequent analyses by summing the items on each scale and dividing by the number of items in the scale. For each of the scales, higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of the strategy. This method was used because the number of items varied among the scales; this allowed scale scores to be comparable. In addition to the *HBQ,* respondents were asked to provide the following information: age, sex, years of experience, type of school (public, private, etc.), level of school, whether the school at which the respondent works has an explicit anti-bullying policy in place, uses a specific anti-bullying program, and whether the respondent has had anti-bullying training, and if so, in what setting (e.g., pre-service, in-service, conference, etc.).

Results

Psychometric Analysis of the HBQ

Although there are a variety of expert opinions on the necessary sample size for factor analysis, the highest value found in the literature is 20 items per variable (Stevens, 1996); thus, the present sample size (735) is sufficient for a 22-item scale. The 22 items of the revised *Handling Bullying Questionnaire* were subjected to Principal Components Analysis. Prior to performing the PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .77, exceeding the recommended minimum value of .6

(Kaiser, 1970), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Principal Components Analysis revealed the presence of seven factors with eigenvalues above 1.0 (Kaiser, 1960), explaining 59% of the variance. However, inspection of the scree plot indicated a break after the fifth component (Catell, 1966). The five-factor solution was interpretable, and so five factors were investigated using Parallel Analysis (Watkins, 2000), which showed five components exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (22 variables x 735 respondents).

To aid in the interpretation of the components, a Varimax rotation was performed. The rotated matrix revealed a relatively simple structure, with most items having a strong loading on one factor. The scales corresponding to the five factors were named as follows: Working with Victim (accounting for 11% of the variance), Working with the Bully (10% of variance), Ignoring the Incident (11% of variance), Enlisting Other Adults (10% of variance), and Disciplining the Bully (8% of variance). Total variance explained by the factors was 49.47%. The rotated component matrix is shown in Table 2. The factor structure, which corresponds to the five hypothesized dimensions, provides initial evidence of construct validity.

Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was used to measure the internal consistency of each sub-scale. Alpha values were as follows: Working with Victim, .75; Working with Bully, .69; Ignoring the Incident, .70; Enlisting Other Adults, .63, and Disciplining the Bully, .45. These values are considered adequate for such short scales, that is, apart from the Disciplining the Bully scale which appeared low. Note that scale contains only three items; reliability is related to scale length. Inspection of the distribution of scores on items in that scale indicated that they covered a relatively small range, which has a depressing effect on

alpha values. In keeping with the recommendations of Obwuegbuzie and Daniel, (2002) and also Fan and Thompson (2001), we calculated the upper-tailed confidence interval for each of the alpha coefficients reported above. The revised alpha values (based on an upper-bound (95% confidence interval) are: Working with the Victim, .78, Working with the Bully, .72, Ignoring the Incident, .73, Consulting with Other Adults, .67, and Disciplining the Bully, .52.

We also note that low alpha values do not necessarily mean that the data are not important (Obwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2002). Internal consistency coefficients tend to be "suppressed estimates of the theoretical reliability coefficient" (Obwuegbuzie & Daniel, p. 94). Also, Field (2005) noted that these coefficients are dependent on the number of items on the subscale, with shorter scales yielding lower coefficients. Finally, Kline (1999) discussed the "rules of thumb" that are used to evaluate reliability coefficients, and concluded that while a minimum of .8 is reasonable for cognitive tests, .7 is more appropriate for ability tests, and lower values can be expected for other constructs.

Correlations among the scales given in Table 3 were also relatively low ($r < .3$). Significant correlations were found between Working with the Bully and (a) Working with the Victim, and (b) Enlisting Other Adults, both $r = .09$ ($p < .01$). This suggests a small but significant proportion of respondents would adopt all of these strategies in addressing the case of bullying. As expected, the Ignoring the Incident score was negatively correlated ($p < .01$) with Working with the Bully ($r = -.14$ and Enlisting other Adults ($r = - .20$). In general, the low correlations suggest that the endorsement of the different approaches was relatively distinct.

Overall Scale Scores of the Sample

Mean scale scores, provided in Table 4, were above the neutral point of 3.0 for both teachers and school counsellors on Disciplining the Bully (the highest priority), Enlisting Other Adults, and Working with the Bully. With respect to Working with the Victim, the

mean score for teachers was below the neutral point, suggesting that they generally did not endorse such actions, whereas for school counsellors, the mean score was slightly above the neutral point. The mean score for Ignoring the Incident was well below the neutral point for both teachers and counsellors, suggesting that this approach was generally considered unacceptable. Variability in scale scores, as indicated by the magnitude of the standard deviations (see Table 4), were greatest for both counsellors and teachers on the Helping the Victim scale. (For both sets of respondents the SD was greater than .8.)

Comparing Participants by Job Title and Gender

To determine whether scale scores differed between teachers and school counsellors, and males and females, and to investigate interactions between job title and gender, a MANCOVA was conducted with the scale scores as dependent variables and gender and job title as independent variables. A Bonferroni adjustment was used because there were five dependent variables in the model (05/5=.01). In addition, preliminary assumption testing indicated that while multicollinearity was at acceptable levels, there were some violations of normality and homogeneity of variance-covariance assumptions, so the alpha was further adjusted to .001, a very conservative level. Statistically significant differences were found for job title and gender on the combined dependent variables: F (5, 575) = 12/219, $p < .0005$; Wilks' Lambda = .90, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, a moderate effect. The interaction term was not significant. When the results for the independent variables are considered separately, the univariate tests for the effect of job title were significant for these scales: Ignore the Bullying (F (1,579) = 15.27, $p < .0005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, a small effect); Working with the Victim (F (1,579) = 13.15, $p < .0005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, a small effect); and Disciplining the Bully (F (1,579) = 12.05, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, a very small effect). Inspection of the mean scores on these scales indicated that school counsellors had lower mean scores on Ignoring the Incident (M = 1.24, SD = .33) than teachers (M = 1.46, SD = 48) and Disciplining the Bully (counsellors: M = 4.29, SD = .69;

teachers: M = 4.53, SD = .56) and obtained higher mean scores for Working with the Victim (counsellors: M = 3.36, SD = .85; teachers: M = 2.98, SD = .87). The multivariate effect of gender was also significant (F (5.575) = 5.08, $p < .0005$; Wilks' Lambda = .96, η_p^2 = .04, a small effect. Examination of the univariate tests for gender revealed a significant effect for Enlisting Other Adults (F (1,579) = 16.16, $p < .0005$, η_p^2 = .03, a small effect). Inspection of means indicated that females obtained higher scores (M = 4.13, SD = .58) than males (M = 3.84, SD = .65) on this scale. The gender difference for Working with the Bully approached significance (F (1.579) = 8.27, $p < .004$, η_p^2 = .01), with females tending to be somewhat more likely to work with the bully.

Differences in Scale Scores by Age, Years of Experience, and School Level

In order to determine whether any differences in scale scores were present based on participant age, years of experience, or school level, multivariate analyses were conducted with the scale scores as dependent variables and age and years of experience as independent variables. Assumption testing and adjustments to alpha were applied as described above. The overall multivariate model testing the significance of the independent variables on the linear combination of the dependent variables was not statistically significant. Examination of the univariate tests revealed that none of the differences by age, years of experience, or school level reached statistical significance on any scale scores.

Differences Based on Policies, Programs, and Training

Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated their schools had an anti-bullying policy in place, while 42% said such a policy had not been adopted. In 31% of participants' schools, a specific anti-bullying program was used, but not in the remaining 69% of schools. Most participants (69%) had received some type of anti-bullying training, although 31% had not. Of those who had received training, only 2% had done so as part of their initial training (pre-service). In-service programs were the source of training for 35% of participants, 12% had

been trained as part of a graduate program. The most common venue for training was at conferences and workshop, with 47% of participants reporting their training came from this source. An additional 4% reported other sources of training.

A series of *t*-tests was conducted to compare mean scale scores between participants whose schools had an anti-bullying policy and those without such a policy, between those whose schools subscribed to a particular anti-bullying program and those whose schools did not, and those participants with and without anti-bullying training. Again, the alpha level was adjusted to .01 due to the repeated analyses, and adjustments were made to the degrees of freedom when Levene's test for equality of variances was significant. A significant difference ($t = 3.62$, $df = 661$, $p < .0005$, $d = .28$, a small effect) was detected on Enlisting other Adults between those with a school policy on bullying ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .60$) and those without ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .59$), and on the Ignoring the Incident scale ($t = -2.72$, $df = 544.21$, $p < .007$, $d = -.26$, a small effect. with those participants who worked in schools with a stated anti-bullying policy being more likely to enlist other adults and less likely to ignore the incident than those whose schools did not have a policy. For the presence or absence of a specific anti-bullying program, significant differences were found for Ignoring the Incident ($t = -3.65$, $df = 481.13$, $p < .0005$, $d = -.31$, a small effect) and Enlisting Other Adults ($t = 2.68$, $df = 662$, $p < .008$ $d = .22$, also a small effect). Respondents in schools with an anti-bullying program had a lower mean score on Ignoring the Incident ($M = 1.26$, $SD = .37$) than those where no program was used ($M = 1.38$, $SD = .47$). The effect of having received anti-bullying training was significant on Ignore the Incident ($t = -4.69$, $df = 315.41$, $p < .0005$, $d = -.53$, a medium effect), with those who had training obtaining a lower mean score ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .37$) than those without ($M = 1.48$, $SD = .54$).

To summarize, those participants whose schools had an anti-bullying policy in place were less likely to Ignore the Incident and more likely to Enlist Other Adults than those

without a policy. Those whose schools had a specific anti-bullying program were less likely to Ignore the Incident, as were those who had received anti-bullying training.

Disciplining the Bully

Because of the low internal consistency coefficient obtained for the Disciplining the Bully scale, each item in the scale was analyzed separately by gender, job title, level, and anti-bullying training. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis) were used due to the non-normal distribution of these items. A Bonferroni correction (.05/3=.02) was applied. Teachers were more likely than counsellors to agree with the items, *I would insist that the bully "cut it out"* than were counsellors (Z = -4.73, p < .0005), and *I would make sure that the bully was suitably punished* (Z = -3.73, p < .0005). No difference was detected by job title on the item *I would tell the bully the behavior is not tolerated.* For school level, responses differed on the item *I would make sure that the bully was suitably punished* (χ^2 = 9.83, p < .02), with the highest level of agreement found for K-8 and elementary level respondents, and the lowest for high school level. Respondents with anti-bullying training were less likely to agree with the item, *I would insist that the bully "cut it out"* than were those without training. No significant differences on any of the items were found for gender.

Comment Data

More than half (54%, n = 395) of respondents included optional comments. These were treated as qualitative data so that the depth and breadth of those contributions could be considered. These comments often described strategies that were not covered in the questionnaire (such as working with bystanders), and add to our understanding of respondents' methods for handling incidents of school bullying. In order to classify the comments, the first step was to group the comments based on the key words used by each participant. Because the initial groupings were based on specific words used by the participants (rather than inferred meanings), they were easily identifiable and eventually

amounted to ninety-seven sub-categories based on key words. The key words used to group the comments at this stage were selected because they illustrated the main idea or central theme of the participants' comments. Because many comments had more than one idea, many comments were placed in multiple sub-categories.

Larger classifications based on broader themes of the participants' main idea began to emerge once the sub-categories were established. For example, many respondents articulated strategies to be implemented specifically for the bully. These included suggestions like empathy training, anti-bullying pledges, bully support groups, behavior modification plans, behavior contracts and using 'logical consequences 'as punishment. All of these sub-categories together became known as the category "Intervention Strategies for Bullies."

Three of the top four most common categories involve interventions or mediations with an adult professional and the involved students in some way (Counsellor-Led Mediation, Intervention Strategies for Bullies, and Intervention Strategies for Victims). Comments that describe interventions with both the victim and the bully together (for example, role playing), or did not specify which students were to be involved at all, were grouped in the "Counsellor-led Mediation" category. Comments that specifically mentioned strategies for the victim or for the bully individually were grouped accordingly.

Table 6 lists each category, the number of comments in the category, and a brief description as well as a comment that illustrates the meaning of that category. They are placed in order from the most common to least common type.

Discussion

The *Handling Bullying Questionnaire* was found to have a five- factor structure that is consistent with existing information about ways in which teachers and school counsellors might respond to a bullying incident. Internal consistency was adequate for these short scales, with the exception of the Disciplining the Bully scale.

An examination of the mean scores for the scales shows that respondents in general were inclined to take some action in the case of bullying with which they were presented. Only on Ignore the Incident was the mean score less than the neutral point of 3. The strong endorsement of the Disciplining the Bully items suggests that this sample of U. S. teachers and school counsellors support imposing sanctions for the bully. This is consistent with the use of the widely endorsed Olweus anti-bullying program (Olweus, 1993) and is considered justifiable in cases of high severity bullying. However, the situation presented to the respondents was one of relatively low severity. Moreover, the effectiveness of a punitive approach for dealing with most cases of bullying, sometimes in the form of "zero- tolerance" policies, is open to question (Skiba, 2000). U.S. teachers and counsellors appear less familiar with non-punitive strategies.

The descriptive data reveal notable variation among respondents regarding actions they would take. The greatest variability was found on the Helping the Victim scale, which had a mean score of 3.18, slightly above the "unsure" point, and a standard deviation of .88, the largest of the scales. This suggests that respondents have the least agreement about what, if anything, should be done to help the victim. For example, the mean score for the item, *I would tell the victim to stand up to the bully,* was just below the mid-point (M =2.95) with the largest standard deviation on the questionnaire (SD=1.19).

The results suggest that a number of variables influenced respondents' choices of what action to take. Having an explicit school policy on bullying was associated with lower scores on the Ignoring the Incident scale and higher scores on the Enlisting Other Adults scale, suggesting that anti-bullying policies reduce the likelihood that bullying will be ignored and increase the chances that educators who observe the incident will involve certain other adults (e.g., the school administrator or counsellor, other teachers, parents). Educators whose schools have adopted a policy are likely to feel obligated to follow the procedures

described in the policy. Having a program at the school appears to raise awareness of the importance of responding, as respondents in schools with programs had lower scores on Ignoring the Incident than those whose schools did not have a program. The use of a program, however, did not seem to result in clarity on the part of the educators as to what actions they should take in response to an incident. The same was true for having had training. Although educators with training were less likely to ignore an incident, there were no other scale differences. This is critical information for those providing training on bullying. In addition to understanding the problem, educators need agreed strategies and approaches to employ when they are faced with bullying behavior in their schools.

One of the most striking findings concerns the differences between counsellors and teachers in modes of responding to bullying. On all scales other than Working with the Bully, school counsellors' scores were significantly different from those of teachers. This may reflect differences in training and the different roles they have in a school. School counsellors are extensively trained in listening and expressing empathy, and focus on the personal/social domain in addition to assisting with academic areas. They also have training and interest in providing both individual and group counseling to victimized students, which is reflected in their higher scores on the Work with the Victim scale. It is important to note that the scenario presented to respondents was an incident including an element of indirect bullying, which may be more salient to school counsellors than to teachers (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). Arguably, counsellors' training may result in their being more sensitive to subtle psychosocial effects, and therefore they are less willing to ignore an incident. Further, most school counsellors believe that enforcing discipline is a conflict of roles, given their commitment to student advocacy (ASCA, n.d.).

Findings from this study provide grounds for concern regarding current practices in the training of educators to deal effectively with school bullying. Most of the educators who

completed this online questionnaire (86%) had not received anti-bullying training either in undergraduate pre-service training or in graduate programs, and 42% work in schools without an anti-bullying policy. This may account in part for the variations in what respondents indicated they would do to address the case of bullying, and also might contribute to the notable differences in the view of teachers and school counsellors, who receive extensive training in many skills that are essential to responding to bullying incidents.

Given that it is inevitable that every educator will encounter incidents of bullying in school, preparation to handle those incidents sensitively and effectively is too important to leave to chance. Relying on conferences or in-service programs, which tend to be short-term, is insufficient. Initial teacher preparation programs would do well to equip their future teachers with a variety of strategies to manage bullying that can be selected depending on the severity and context. For example, the Method of Shared Concern, the No Blame approach, and the Restorative Justice method are techniques with which new teachers should be familiar. These approaches are less well-known in the U. S. than in countries such as Australia and the U. K. Training should not be exclusively didactic; future educators need the opportunity to practice new skills in this area, using role plays and observation.

Additional evidence for the importance of training can be found in participants' endorsements of strategies that are not likely to be effective or that are based on lack of knowledge. For example, many respondents endorsed the item saying they would work to increase the self-esteem of the bully. This is contrary to evidence (Rigby, 1996; Seals & Young, 2003) that bullies in fact often have average or above average self-esteem. In the comments, the most frequently mentioned category referred to mediation. While mediation may be helpful in some cases, the power imbalance that is inherent in bullying means that such methods are often inappropriate.

Slightly over a third of participants had received in-service training, suggesting that the majority of school districts have not devoted resources to provide such essential training. Even those teachers and counsellors who have had training elsewhere would benefit from training specific to the individual school and school district environment. Almost half of participants relied on conferences and workshops for training. While such events often feature prominent experts, they are generally costly and involve time away from the school setting. These factors make it difficult for many educators to attend, and the entire staff will rarely have an opportunity to attend as a group. Effective intervention in bullying requires a committed, well-trained staff working together, and without ongoing training and support it is difficult to attain the critical mass needed to make a difference and reduce bullying. The importance of including anti-bullying training has been stressed by previous researchers (e.g., Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; O'Moore, 2000; Yoon & Kerber, 2003) and the findings in this study support the recommendation that anti-bullying training should be provided as part of initial teacher preparation, and that such training should do more that heighten awareness of the problem. Teachers need skills in responding to bullying when it occurs, so that practical training is an essential component.

Limitations

Because this survey was administered in an online environment, participants were interested enough to locate the website after learning about the questionnaire. Thus, the sample was neither random nor unbiased, with educators who believe that bullying is not worthy of concern unlikely to choose to participate. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to all U. S. teachers and school counsellors.

It is noted that although many of the differences between sub-groups of respondents were statistically significant, given the large sample size, the effects tended to be small. However, some of the key findings are consistent with those of the two previous studies

(Dake, Price, Telljohann & Funk, 2003; Harris &Willoughby, 2003) and are of practical significance. Further replication of the results is nevertheless desirable.

Finally, the findings from this study are based upon what teachers and counsellors say they would do in response to a given situation of moderate severity bullying with elements of both direct verbal and indirect forms. Generalizations to others degrees and forms of bullying should not be made. In this study, we gathered information on what respondents thought they would do. This may not be what they would do in practice, and further studies are needed to determine whether teachers and counsellors act consistently with their professed intentions. Nevertheless, as Poulou (2001) has argued, the use of vignettes are the most appropriate method for understanding teachers' cognitive and affective responses to specific incidents, and can provide useful information for designing effective training programs.

Future research

The *Handling Bullying Questionnaire* should be tested with other populations of teachers and counsellors in order to gather further normative data and to confirm its overall psychometric adequacy. A further revision of the *Discipline the Bully* scale is in order, given its relatively low level of internal consistency. We are currently preparing a further paper in which comparisons will be presented for school personnel in different countries, namely Australia, Canada, Norway, Korea, Germany and Austria. Finally, the questionnaire could also be used as a pre- and post-training measure to observe whether training provided to educators results in any changes in their predicted actions.

Conclusion

On the basis of responses provided by a sample of US teachers and school counsellors, the revised *Handling Bullying Questionnaire* (Rigby, 2006) was shown to possess a clear factorial structure. It has provided useful information about the strategies teachers believe they would use in response to a specific bullying incident. The respondents

in general were not in favor of ignoring the incident, but favored a disciplinary approach to the bully, and were less inclined to work with the victim. Differences in preferences for the various strategies were detected between school counsellors and teachers, with counsellors more interested in working with the victim and other adults, and less inclined to ignore the problem or favor punitive actions. The findings point to considerable divergence in views about how cases of bullying should be treated, and indicated a need for better education and training of school personnel in this area.

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Appendix

Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ)

including response distribution by percent*

Handling Bullying[1]

Teachers have alternative ways of dealing with incidents of bullying in a school.

To some extent, what is done depends on the circumstances in which the bullying takes place, and the severity of the bullying. It is, of course, sometimes difficult to generalize, but in answering the following questions, indicate what you think you ***might*** do.

Imagine the following scenario:

> **A 12-year-old student is being repeatedly teased and called unpleasant names by another, more powerful, student who has successfully persuaded other students to avoid the targeted person as much as possible. As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and often isolated.**

Click on the button that is closest to what you think you would do.

	I definitely would	I probably would	I'm unsure	I probably would not	I definitely would not
1. I would insist that the bully "cut it out."	65	18	5	8	5
2. I would treat the matter lightly.	1	1	2	18	78
3. I would make sure the bully was suitably punished.	38	33	17	7	2
4. I would discuss the matter with my colleagues at school.	56	33	4	4	1
5. I would convene a meeting of students, including the bully or bullies, tell them what was happening, and ask them to suggest ways they could help improve the situation.	24	31	20	18	6
6. I would tell the victim to stand up to the bully.	11	25	24	29	11
7. I would make it clear to the bully that his or her behavior would not be tolerated.	83	14	1	1	1
8. I would leave it for someone else to sort out.	1	1	4	25	67
9. I would share my concern with the bully about what happened to the victim, and	42	37	10	8	2

seek to get the bully to behave in a more caring and responsible manner.					
10. I would let the students sort it out themselves.	1	2	3	34	57
11. I would suggest that the victim act more assertively.	18	41	18	17	5
12. I would discuss with the bully options from which he or she could make a choice in order to improve the situation.	39	43	9	5	2
13. I would ask the school counsellor to intervene.	61	24	7	2	1
14. I would refer the matter to an administrator (e.g., principal, vice-principal, dean).	43	31	17	7	1
15. I would contact the victim's parents or guardians to express my concern about their child's well-being.	26	30	28	13	2
16. I would just tell the kids to "grow up."	<.5	3	2	17	77
17. I would encourage the victim to show that he or she could not be intimidated.	15	38	22	16	8
18. I would ignore it.	2	<.5	1	8	87
19. I would help the bully achieve greater self-esteem so that he or she would no longer want to bully anyone.	18	37	22	16	7
20. I would insist to the parents(s) or guardian(s) of the bully that the behavior must stop.	26	34	22	14	3
21. I would find the bully something more interesting to do.	9	23	31	29	6
22. I would advise the victim to tell the bully to "back off."	8	26	25	28	11

[1] Used with Permission: Dr. Ken Rigby, University of South Australia

* Percentages for each item may not total 100% due to rounding and missing data.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	n	% of valid responses
Gender		
Male	106	15
Female	613	85
Missing	6	
Job title		
Pre-service teacher	10	1
Teacher	275	38
Counsellor	425	60
Missing	15	
School level		
K – 8	105	15
Elementary	223	31
Middle/Junior High	212	30
High School	177	25
Missing	18	
Years of Experience		
5 years or less	241	33
6 – 10 years	140	19
11 – 15 years	106	15
16 – 20 years	65	9

21 – 25 years	58	8
26 or more	114	16
Missing	11	
Age		
Under 30 years old	120	17
31 – 40	172	24
41 – 50	176	24
51 – 60	230	32
61 or older	24	3
Missing	13	
Race/Ethnic group		
African American	22	3
Asian American	5	7
Caucasian	622	85
Hispanic/Latino	30	4
Native American	23	3
Other	16	2
Missing	15	

Table 2

Factor Loadings on the Handling Bullying Questionnaire

Rotated Component Matrix [a]

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
let someone else sort it out	.715	-.043	-.119	.087	-.051
let students sort it out themselves	.683	.070	.079	-.155	-.090
treat it lightly	.645	-.023	-.053	-.121	-.043
tell kids to grow up	.636	.120	-.104	-.051	.198
ignore it	.604	-.047	-.023	-.082	-.075
encourage victim to show not intimidated	-.037	.780	.085	.071	-.058
tell victim to stand up	.036	.776	.151	.006	.150
suggest victim be more assertive	-.036	.752	.144	.077	-.129
advise victim to tell bully back off	.080	.663	.058	.064	.209
help bully achieve self-esteem	.000	.233	.722	.088	-.112
discuss w bully option to improve	-.153	.048	.694	.072	.024
share concern w bully	-.104	.005	.671	-.047	.272
meet w students	-.069	.095	.589	.098	.048
find something interesting for bully	.107	.092	.558	.213	-.048
refer to administrator	.037	.053	-.083	.742	.091
contact victim's parents	-.161	.101	.203	.710	-.062
insist to bully parents behavior must stop	-.041	.076	.189	.554	.349
ask school counselor	-.134	.074	.213	.525	-.132
discuss with colleagues	-.085	-.017	.041	.460	.180
insist the bully cut it out	.128	.070	.019	-.037	.749
make sure bully punished	-.029	-.030	.030	.386	.620
tell bully behavior not tolerated	-.287	.078	.053	.088	.559

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Note. Item wording is abbreviated

Table 3

Correlations among HBQ scale scores

	Ignore	Victim	Bully	Adults	Discipline
Ignore	1	.019	-.144(**)	-.203(**)	-.072
Victim		1	.288(**)	.182(**)	.113(**)
Bully			1	.289(**)	.116(**)
Adults				1	.273(**)
Discipline					1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Scale Scores by Job Title

	job title	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ignore	teacher	254	1.50	.58
	school counsellor	414	1.25	.34
Victim	teacher	265	2.98	.92
	school counsellor	423	3.33	.83
Bully	teacher	262	3.60	.75
	school counsellor	409	3.65	.69
Adults	teacher	263	4.00	.59
	school counsellor	389	4.14	.61
Discipline	teacher	268	4.52	.57
	school counsellor	423	4.27	.69

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Scale Scores by Respondent Gender

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ignore	male	99	1.49	.57
	female	577	1.32	.44
Victim	male	104	3.03	.90
	female	593	3.23	.87
Bully	male	100	3.44	.79
	female	579	3.67	.70
Adults	male	101	3.87	.66
	female	560	4.11	.59
Discipline	male	103	4.37	.62
	female	597	4.37	.66

Table 6

Categories of Comment Data on the HBQ (n=395)

Category	N	Description	Example
Counsellor-led Mediation	116	Strategies to mediate student conflict, such as role playing, peer mediation, modeling, group discussions, classroom meetings.	*I feel like mediation should be a key component in a bullying situation. Getting both sides to see how the bullying is effecting* [sic] *others and why the behavior is occurring is important.*
Intervention Strategies for Bullies	74	Approaches to be used with the bullying, including social isolation, tolerance groups, consequences, referrals to mental health professionals, meetings with counsellor.	*"I have had the bully pretend they are the victim and it is evening. They have to write in their journal what happened to the*
Preventative School-wide policy	61	Need for anti-bullying program or zero-tolerance policy.	*It needs to be a school wide program. Students, parents and staff need to know what to do and how to handle the situation. There should be a consistent school-wide way of handling the discipline procedures for this type of bullying behavior.*

Intervention Strategies for Victims	48	Suggestions such as assertiveness training, self-esteem work, support groups, and extra attention. Some comments expressed a need for staff to be alert for “professional victims” who instigate the bullying to gain attention.	*It may be possible to get the victim to understand that his or her reaction to bullying is feeding the bully. The victim needs to learn and rehearse appropriate techniques for defusing the situation. It can only make the victim more independent. He or she needs to face the fact that they cannot use others to remedy their pain.*
Parent Involvement and Home Life of Bully	37	Emphasized importance of home environment on bullying behaviors, and the importance of parental participation.	*I think the school should speak to the parents of both kids, not to "insist" the bullying stop in the case of the bully's parents, but to appeal for their assistance so school and home can work together on the problem.*
Comprehensive Guidance Program	37	Need for comprehensive school guidance program, including classroom guidance lessons, panel discussion, and school-wide character-building education.	*Teach the student body as a whole the definition of bullying, how to identify what is happening, and strategies in how to make the first attempt at stating their feelings ("I Statements"), etc. When the training is done to all students, it allows the school to be on the "same page" in*

			terms of consequences for repeated bullying, etc
Bystanders	37	Need for training of bystanders to take a stand against bullying.	*Bystanders must be taught to stand up for targets of bullying.*
Teacher Education and Training	36	Need for teacher training in recognizing and dealing with school bullying.	*Education regarding the matter would be the first step in combating such a social atrocity. So many kids are left to 'defend' themselves and most staff members feel that they aren't adequately trained to deal with such matters.*
Need for a Caring Community	24	Need to warm and caring environment in which bullying is not tolerated. Also mentioned need to involve larger community around school.	*Work with the student body as a whole to encourage a culture of kindness so that there is positive pressure put on kids to treat others with respect.*
Distinguishing between types of bullying	22	Need for clear definitions of bullying. Strategies vary with situation and type.	*Define bullying not only as physical intimidation and threats but words as well, words that cause emotional turmoil for students including 'cyber' format.*
Specific anti-bullying	20	Suggested specific programs for dealing with	*Our school has participated in the "Challenge Day" program for the*

programs		bullying.	*last two years. Although it has not been the answer for every day kinds of issues, I do think it has made a difference in the severe problems of students who have been the universal target for years. There has been a significant reduction in those kids being the target of teasing.*
Systemic Changes	16	Need for more systemic changes in order for effective change in bullying behaviors.	*Teachers need support from administrators when dealing with bullies*
Other	22	Comments about the survey, personal anecdotes, unique programs, and comments that could not be classified.	*Eye opener about my own practices and beliefs*