Analysis of Middle School Student Bullying Experiences and Student Reported School
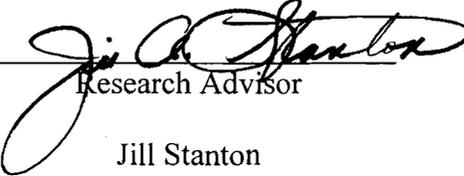
Climate

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze and evaluate self-reported bullying experiences, responses to those bullying experiences, student reported school safety and school climate at Menomonie Middle School in February, 2005. The sample was comprised of 212 sixth graders, 224 seventh graders, and 217 eighth graders, approximately 89.5% of the total student population. There were 305 males, 343 females, and 5 students that chose not to identify themselves. Students were asked to complete a survey describing bullying experiences and overall school climate concerns regarding bullying. The survey was administered and collected by Menomonie Middle School prior to the beginning of the research. Data was collected and descriptive and

correlation statistics were used to test the research hypotheses and answer research questions.

One general finding of this study is that there seems not to be a statistical correlation between grade level and number of self-reported bullying experiences at Menomonie Middle School. There also is a possible trend, but not a statistical significance, between gender and number of self-reported bullying instances with females reporting more instances. Additional themes are presented and discussed as they pertain to student experiences with bullying and school climate.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Bullying is a major issue facing schools in the United States and across the globe today. A recent study has shown that bullying affects approximately 30% of students in the United States, per semester (Nansel et al., 2001). Nansel at al.'s (2001) and Beale's (2001) studies also show something that middle level educators and counselors have known for a while, that the majority of bullying instances occur at the middle school level. Although middle level educators may be aware that most of the bullying occurs at middle school, students report that school staff, faculty, and administration are not doing enough to combat the problem. In fact, many times the adults in the schools do not recognize the actions as bullying and thus legitimize the act by doing nothing.

Until recent media coverage of school shooting tragedies, adult ambivalence towards bullying has probably prevented programs that adequately deal with the problem of bullying at school. Programs that are aimed at violence prevention, respect, and resiliency have been in place in schools for some time, but these do not address all of the forms of bullying or even directly bullying itself. One possible explanation for why school bullying instances have been ignored is that adults may have seen bullying as a "right of passage for children and youth" (Limber & Small, 2003, p. 445). Many adults experienced acts of bullying in their childhood or were bullies themselves. These adults may sometimes feel that if they survived their bullying experiences, then today's children can also.

Most adults in the past were generally taught two primary strategies to deal with bullying, ignore the bullying or stand up to the bully, and have passed these strategies for

the most part on to their children. However, many students have reported that when they try to use these two methods the situation does not go away and at times can become worse for the victim of the bullying (Baldry, A., 2004). The bullies often find ways to manipulate situations and take more serious and violent actions. Many adults have long taught children that bullies have low self-esteem and are looking to make themselves feel better at the expense of others. However, some researchers (Owleus, 2001; Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 2000) have shown that children who bully often tend to feel good about themselves and find power in bullying others.

Bullying is not a healthy part of growing up and can cause serious socialization problems for both the student doing the bullying, the victim of the bullying, and the bystander who observes the bullying but does nothing (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003, Harris & Petrie, 2003). Children who bully on a consistent and regular basis are more likely to continue bullying behaviors and may even become criminals in their adult life. These bullies may be involved frequently in violent activity and court convictions (Owelus, 2001).

Those who are victims of bullying often can experience feelings of being left out, depression, suicidal thoughts, and retaliation (Kocs, 1999). These targets or victims of the bullying have also shown a tendency to be involved with alcohol and drug abuse and many exhibit problems in their academic advancement (Olweuss, 1993). Student retaliation upon schools and/or students in the schools has received the most media attention. School shooters frequently have reported that they are or have been the subject of bullying. According to the Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (cited in Pizza, 2001), of the 37 recorded school shootings in the past 25 years, in more than two-

thirds of the attacks, the attackers experienced instances of bullying, threats, or attacks by others before they staged their own assault. These students have stated that many times the bullying was so intense that they were going to find a way to make the bully or bullies pay for the pain that they had inflicted (Harris & Petrie, 2003).

Students who are bullied often state that they experience most of the bullying in secret away from adult supervision, during the unstructured time of eating lunch, passing between classes, and before and after school. At these times teachers are either not able to see all of the interactions between the students or are not even present in the area. Dan Olweus (2001), a leading researcher in the field of student bullying, found that the most effective deterrents to bullying were adults intervening and just being visible. Adults, teachers, counselors, principals, and staff members need to be present in those areas where there are opportunities for students to bully other students and be relatively anonymous. These adults need to be trained to watch for bullying instances that might occur and how to intervene. If an adult is present and allows the bullying instance to occur, the situation can become worse. Not only do the victim and the bully see that the adults will not become involved, but also the other students who are watching the incident, the bystanders.

The bystanders are the silent majority of the school population, the individuals who fear retribution from the bully if they were to tell adults about the bullying situation, especially if they see a lack of attention from adults towards bullying incidents (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sauger, & Short-Camilli, 1994). It is also the group of students that is most targeted by many anti-bullying programs to assist in solving bullying in the schools (Bonds & Stoker 2000, Olweus 2001). Bystanders, according to the research, by

standing up to bullying and making the school climate feel open and welcoming to differences, make the school a more friendly and safe place for education (Bonds & Stoker, 2000).

Schools that do not have an adequate anti-bullying program place themselves in a precarious position, having students who may feel unsafe in their own school. This problem is twofold. First, schools have a legal responsibility to provide students with a safe learning environment. Starting in 2001, many states have addressed the need for anti-bullying programs by passing laws stating that harassment programs and bullying education must be taught as part of the curriculum in public schools (Limber & Small, 2003). This wave of legislation, however, is at many times vague, does not always define all of the aspects of bullying, and is often more reactive to events in society (e.g. Columbine High School shootings) that have been reported as manifestations of repeated instances of bullying.

Second, students who do not feel safe at their schools are more likely to experience forms of bullying (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003). Consequently, the problem becomes cyclical; students, who do not feel safe in their schools, become more likely to be bullied and students who are bullied or who witness bullying, feel less safe at their school. Students have the right to attend a school where they feel safe and do not experience harassment that hinders their ability to learn.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and analyze the student responses to instances of bullying by middle school students at one Wisconsin school. The study also looked at student perceptions to school safety in regards to bullying. Data from a

previously administered assessment from Menomonie Middle School, in Menomonie, Wisconsin, in February of 2005, was used for the purposes of this study. The data was not previously analyzed before due to time constraints and new goals for the school.

Research Hypotheses and Questions

There were two research hypotheses and four research questions addressed in this study. They were:

Hypotheses:

1. There is no relationship between grade level and reported number of bullying instances.

2. There is no relationship between reported number of bullying instances and gender.

Research questions:

1. Where did the largest percentage of reported bullying instances occur?

2. Of those who reported being bullied, what did the largest percentage of respondents do about the incident?

3. Where do the highest percentages of students feel the most unsafe at school?

4. How do students describe the climate of their school?

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used for the terms of bully, bullying, and victim.

Bully - An individual that engages in harming physical or emotionally another person or persons with a strong need to dominate with power and threats (Garrity, C., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N., & Short-Camilli, C., 2000).

Bullying - a form of aggression in which one or more children harm, disturb, sexually harass, intimidate, or demonstrate other intentional negative actions repeatedly and over a length of time to another student (Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005; Kocs, 1999; Owleus, 1993).

Bystander - An individual that witnesses an act of bullying done to another person, neither the bully nor the victim (Garrity et al., 2000).

Victim – An individual that experiences the act of bullying, reacting either passively or aggressively to the bullying (Garrity et al., 2000).

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the students filled out the survey honestly. It is also assumed that all of the students were present to fill out the survey and did so. Limitations of the study are that the students might not have answered the survey honestly and accurately because of the sensitive nature of the questions asked. In addition, the survey is of one middle school in an upper mid-western community; therefore, findings might not be representative or be generalized towards the general middle school population.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the pertinent and relevant literature pertaining to

bullying at middle schools. Including a discussion on the history of bully prevention,

why children bully, gender differences in bullying, characteristics of victims, effects of

bullying on students, and why middle school interventions are critical.

History of Bully Prevention

Bullying behaviors have been in existence in schools from pre-Victorian times

until present day (Neddam, 2004). These behaviors were not seen as detrimental to

children, rather they were seen as an accepted part of growing up and a right of passage

(Limber & Small, 2003). Adult responses to bullying were molded after their own

experiences with bullying, and were many times seen as a right of passage into

adulthood. Bullying behaviors are not isolated to the United States or a certain

geographical region; rather, studies show that bullying exists across cultural, ethnic and

national boundaries (Baldry, 2004; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Sutton, Smith, &

Sweetenham, 1999). However, the existence of bully prevention programs in schools

have only surfaced in the last 30 years, starting with researcher Dan Olweus' research in

Sweden in 1973 (Smith, 2000). In the United States, emphasis on bullying intervention

programs has started to take hold after highly publicized school shooting incidents and

the disclosure by the school shooters themselves that they were the victims of bullying

incidents (Harris & Petrie 2003; Limber & Small, 2003; Smokowski & Kopaz 2005).

Bullying prevention programs have also taken a political turn in the United States

in the last ten years, with state legislative bodies making bullying prevention programs a

mandated part of the state approved curriculum (Limber & Small, 2003; Espelage &

Swearer, 2004).

Why Children Bully

Children bully for many different reasons; however, the primary reason denoted

in the literature is that of power. The bully uses power over other individuals and power

and control over their environment (Garrity et al., 1994). This power is exhorted over

individuals due to the bully's need to dominate the person or situation. According to

Bandura's social learning theory (as cited in Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004), children

learn their aggressive behaviors, and receive reinforcement for their own aggressive

behaviors. In the case of bullying, children learn their aggressive behaviors at home and

from society in general, and receive reinforcement in the form of praise and social

acceptance for their behaviors (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004).

Eron's study (Cited in Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, Short-Camilli, 2000) found

that parents who were bullies are more likely to use aggressive means in their parenting,

and their children were more likely to become bullies themselves. Therefore, bullies

probably learn to be bullies from receiving a positive reward from society or their family

unit.

Owleus' (1993) studies have found factors from the home involved with why a

child bullies. One factor is the emotional attitude of the primary caregiver being

negative, lacking love, nurturing and involvement with the child. The second factor from

the studies, explains that in most bullies' households, there exists very little in clearly

defined rules and expectations and punishments are handed out very arbitrarily. Like that

of Eron (cited in Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, Short-Camilli, 2000) Owleus (1993) found

that physical punishment from the primary care giver and/or emotional outburst, may

lead to a child learning that violence is an appropriate behavior.

When these bullies enter school, the powerful feeling that they receive by

controlling and dominating another individual or individuals reinforces their aggressive

tactics. These children can then see others who are weaker and less powerful as

deserving to be the victim of the bullying (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004).

Most bullies do not experience lower self-esteem as many adults conjecture;

rather, they often have high self-esteem and have very devious and manipulative ways to

inflict pain and receive power over their victims with the avoidance of detection (Sutton,

Smith, Swettenham, 1999). Most bullies are wise and understand when and where they

can perpetrate their acts of bullying. These places are where adults are not present or

watching, thus allowing the bully to perpetrate the bullying without fear of retribution

(Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Bullies are often also well versed in the use of technology. By cyber-bullying,

bullies use internet chat rooms, web logs (blogs), online voting booths, and photo albums

to bully other students (Keith & Martin, 2005). The internet allows bullies to perpetrate

their acts of bullying without the fear of parental or school punishment many times due to

the relative anonymity of the internet (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Bullies often state that the people that they victimize are those students who are

weaker than the bully is, or that the way the victim acted was a provocation to the bully.

Bullies claim that the student being victimized was partially to blame for the bullying

instance because of the victim's actions (Garrity et all., 1994). These statements, along

with studies in the literature (Baldry, 2004; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Demaray &

Malecki, 2003) seem to support the notion that most children who bully show the inability to have empathy for others.

Uneaver and Cornell's (2004) study also showed that bullies are less likely to have a large social support system, possibly due to their inability to empathize with others. According to Garrity et al. (1994), bullies have a small group of peers that see the bullying as a fun activity. These friends feed the bully's desire for power by agreeing with the bully and allowing the bully to intimidate them into silence or acceptance of the bullying acts (Garrity et al., 1994).

Bullies have also been shown to experience mental health problems. Owleus (cited in Smokowski and Kopaz, 2005) stated that most bullies experience a low tolerance for frustration, and may have an impulsive ill temperament. According to one study of children who have been identified as bullies, one-third had attention-deficit disorder, 12 percent had depression, and 12 percent had oppositional-defiant disorder (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). These stated characteristics, along with a bully's refusal or inability to be accountable for their actions, can lead to signs of antisocial behavior (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, Short-Camilli, 2000).

Gender Differences in Bullying

The literature shows that bullying takes on different forms depending on the gender of the bully. According to Vail (2002) and Horrowitz et al. (2004), girls are more likely to use relational aggression and social exclusion to bully. Girls' use of rumors, withholding friendship, writing graffiti, and telling stories that are not true are some of the covert ways of intimidation that girls use to bully others. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in physical and overt acts of bullying like that of hitting, kicking,

threatening, touching inappropriately, and the use of racial/ethnic slurs (Gamleil et al., 2003). The literature tends to show that girls who bully are more likely to go unnoticed by the adults in a school, that the adults have received training on dealing with the more overt and aggressive forms but have let the less aggressive forms go by unnoticed (Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005).

Girls are also more involved in the cyber bullying or virtual abuse than that of their male peers (Keith & Martin, 2005). Girls are more likely to use the internet instant messenger, online conversations and emails as ways to intimidate others (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Gender lines seem to play an important role in whom the bullies identify as their victims. Girl bullies tend to bully only girls, while boy bullies engage in less discrimination of gender (Clark and Kieskle, 1997). Girls may manipulate boys in their bullying of other girls, but their goal is not to bully the boy (Horrowitz et al., 2004).

Characteristics of Victims

Victims seem to have one thing in common, according to the bullies, that they bring on the bullying and the violence themselves (Horrowitz et al, 2004; Garrity et al, 1994; Olweus, 1993). In Gamliel's et al. (2003) quantitative study, respondents saw victims as passive to the bullying and thus made the bullying behaviors okay to pursue.

Bullies have described many reasons that children are bullied. Horrowitz et al. (2004) found through interviews that traits of victims tend to be multi-faceted. In academic ability and performance, if a student was too smart, or not smart enough, they probably received some form of bullying.

Horrowitz et al. (2004) also saw factors of family and environment playing a part in who experienced bullying. If the student's family's housing, car, parent's occupation, and socioeconomic status did not meet with peer group approval, students were more vulnerable to instances of bullying (Horrowitz et al., 2004).

A third reason given by bullies is an individual's personality and behavior. Students who have unique personality traits, irritating or threatening to the status quo, were identified as being unacceptable to their peers and thus the target for bullying. In this category, Horrowitz et al. (2004) noted that being associated with traits of the opposite gender, sexual preference, or racial/ethnic group "placed a student in jeopardy for particularly malicious forms of harassment" (p 169).

Physical appearance was given as a fourth reason why certain students were targeted for bullying (Horrowitz et al., 2004). Examples were given describing any visible attribute that did not meet with the acceptance of the peer group. These examples can be the physical body shape of an individual, disability or health problem, or clothing. Of the physical appearance sources of teasing, Horrowitz's et al. (2004) study found clothing to be a frequent source of bullying, crossing racial, ethnic, regional, and socioeconomic (SES) status.

Ma (2002) found that in middle school, the characteristics of victims of bullying change throughout the grade levels. From 6th grade to 8th grade, the respondents identified having poor affective and physical attributes as associated with the students that receive the most instances of bullying. As in Horrowitz's et al. (2004) study, school characteristics like that of academic ability and performance were not seen as important as the physical characteristics in determining who was bullied (Ma, 2002).

Effects of bullying on students

The effects of bullying behaviors on students can be powerful, devastating and long lasting for all involved. Olweus(1993) noted that students who experience bullying are more likely to experience lower self-esteem and bouts of depression. Studies also have shown that students who experience repeated bullying experiences are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Kocs, 1999; Olweus, 1993). Students who experience bullying also have been involved as the attackers in the majority of the school shooting tragedies (Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center as Cited in Pizza, 2001). The effects of being bullied do not just stop with the end of the school age years. The victimization that is experienced can affect future relationships, professional goals, and increase the likelihood of substance abuse (Kocs, 1999).

Students who are bullies also experience long lasting and detrimental effects from their bullying. Individuals who are involved in bullying behavior are more likely to underachieve in school and have lower performance in the work settings (Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005). Studies also have shown that students who engage in bullying behaviors are more likely to develop antisocial habits in adulthood, are more likely to have a criminal court conviction before they are 30 years old, and display aggression in stressful situations (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer & Perry, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005). Adults who have identified being a bully in the past are also more likely to act aggressively with their spouse and children, and those children have shown a predisposition to becoming bullies themselves (Carney & Merrell, 2001).

Bystander students also show effects of bullying in their schools. These students experience fear of intervening on behalf of the victim because they might become the victim themselves (Garrity et al, 2000). Students who witness the bullying are more likely to see it as a common event and downplay the seriousness of the situation (Nishina, Juvonen & Witkow, 2005). This downplaying of significance in regards to the bullying allows for the actions of the bully to be legitimized, and when bystanders become adults, they may perpetuate the idea that bullying is part of adolescence.

Importance of middle school interventions

The importance of interventions at the middle level are a most necessary part of reducing the incidence, with 10% of 5th through 7th graders and 5% of 8th through ninth graders reporting being bullied (Harris & Petrie 2003, Kaufman et al. 2001). The middle school level is where students report the most bullying incidents, where bullying seems to be at it's most harsh and most accepted by adults as part of going through adolescence (Harris & Petrie, 2003). Studies have also reported that in middle school bullying incidences seem to increase (Harris & Petrie 2003, Hover and Oliver 2005).

Harris and Petrie (2003) suggest that, in the United States, middle schools are where severe bullying occurs due to many reasons. Middle school student populations are often the result of a number of neighborhood elementary schools coming together into one much larger school. According to Harris and Petrie, the larger school causes students to have less of a connection with others, and they are more likely to engage in bullying behaviors to establish power and dominance in the new surroundings. Harris and Petrie also note that bullying is more defined at the middle school level because of the difference in the way the school day is organized from the elementary school, with

different teachers for each subject matter and the lack of the emotional bond made with primarily one teacher at the elementary level.

Hover and Oliver (1995) also report that students claim that the most trauma from bullying occurs at the middle school level. At the middle school level bullying also seems to be the most detrimental to students that are involved as a bully, victim or bystander. Hover and Oliver suggest that students who are actively involved in bullying at the middle level have poorer social skills than that of bullies at other levels, the victims seem to experience longer lasting effects of depression and poor self-esteem, and the bystanders at the middle level are more likely to accept the bullying incidents as a normal part of growing up.

Harris and Petrie (2003) explain the necessary reason why interventions at the middle school level are of great importance,

> By the time children reach middle school, bullying has become its most intense. However, children of this age are far less likely than elementary children to report to any adult that they are being bullied, unless strong bonds have already been formed. In fact, unless middle schools are organized with a critical emphasis on the building of relationships, a serious mismatch will exist between the school organization and the needs of its young adolescents (p 41).

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will include information describing the subjects for this study and how they were selected. In addition, the instrument will be discussed, along with data collection and analysis. The chapter will conclude with methodological limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

Subjects for this study were sixth through eighth grade students at Menomonie Middle School, in Menomonie, WI. The sample was comprised of 212 sixth graders, 224 seventh graders, and 217 eighth graders, approximately 89.5% of the total student population. There were 305 males, 343 females, and 5 students that chose not to identify themselves. The survey was completed by Menomonie Middle School prior to this research study. Subject selection was out of the control of the researcher, but was made by school personnel. This was determined by the students who were in attendance on the day that the survey was distributed and administered.

Instrumentation

The middle school reproduced, with permission, the survey portion of the study from Bully-Proofing Your School: a Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools by Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, and Short-Camilli. (See Appendix B) The survey was administered during TAP (Teacher Advisory Program) periods by the school faculty and administration. The survey included questions about types of bullying that the respondent had experienced and the frequency of those experiences. The survey also

included questions regarding school climate and safety, witnessing bullying events, who was told about the bullying events, gender, race/ethnic group and grade level.

Data Collection

This survey was administered by the school district in February of 2005. Parents and students were informed by the school administration of the survey and the purpose prior to administration of the survey. The surveys were intended to be analyzed to document the need for an anti-bullying program to be implemented at Menomonie Middle School. The surveys were collected but the data analysis was not performed. The surveys were collected by the middle school administration following the administration of the surveys. The Menomonie Middle School administration contacted University of Wisconsin-Stout, Guidance and Counseling department in regards to an individual wanting to use the data for a thesis project. The Guidance and Counseling department recommended the researcher to work with the data (See Appendix A). The researcher received permission from the school district to use the data. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-Stout granted an exemption from human subject review because the data was collected under normal educational operations.

Data Analysis

Appropriate descriptive and calculated statistical analyses were used to evaluate the data. The data was analyzed by using SPSS for PC by Christine Ness, University of Wisconsin-Stout Research & Statistical Consultant. Frequency counts and cross tabulations were calculated to report type of bullying behavior, school climate and school safety. Cross tabulation with a chi square analysis was performed to compare gender and grade level group differences with reported bullying instances.

Limitations

Methodological limitations of this study include the lack of reliability and validity of the survey. Only one middle school in one school district is participating in the study so the results should not be generalized to other schools or districts. The survey was also administered by the school district prior to the involvement of the researcher, thus there is the possibility of irregularities that are outside of the control of the researcher. The survey also has limitations in regards to honesty of student responses and students who did not choose to participate in the survey, in regards to the accuracy of the findings.

Chapter IV:

Results

This chapter will include the results of this study. The data from the survey of bullying incidents and school climate in regards to bullying was administered to the students of Menomonie Middle School and was managed by the school district prior to this research study. The survey asked students to identify certain types of behaviors that have been associated with bullying, where those behaviors and incidents occurred, the gender of the bully, how safe they felt at their school, their own grade level, and how they feel about their school. Results of the entire group will be explained as well as the subgroups "grade" and "gender".

Data Analysis

The data showed the following frequencies in regards to where students reported bullying to occur: in the classroom (31%=n155), school grounds (30%=n151), lunchroom and hallways (54%=n271), to and from school (20.9%=n104), locker-room and bathroom (15.3%=n76), and before and after school (14.1%=n70), as shown in figure 1 below.
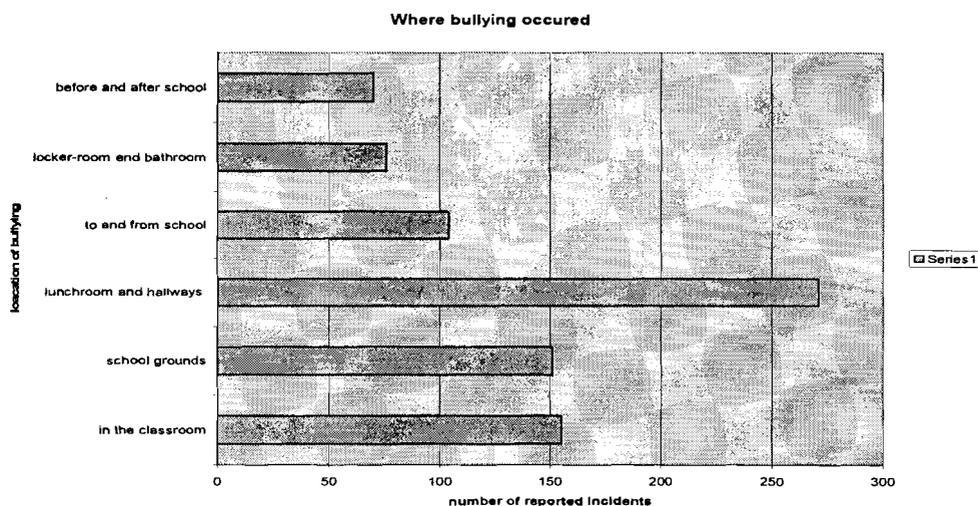

Figure 1: Where bullying incidents occurred Item 01 and Items 05A-F Cross tabulation

Student responses to questions under the heading "How Safe Do You Feel?" assessed school safety. Each question was also given a nominal category (1-5 respectively) of very unsafe and scared, unsafe and scared, kind of unsafe, kind of safe, safe, very safe. Students were asked to respond during the past month how safe they personally felt at each of the places listed. In the classroom, very unsafe and scared (n11=1.7%), unsafe and scared (n3=.5%), kind of unsafe (n43=6.6%), kind of safe (n43=6.6%) safe (n223=34.2%), very safe (n347=53.1%), with 6 non-respondents.

On the school grounds: very unsafe and scared (n18=2.8%), unsafe and scared (n14=2.1%), kind of unsafe (n45=6.9%), kind of safe (n104=15.9%), safe (n229=35.1%), very safe (n236=36.1%) with 7 non-respondents.

In the hallways and lunchroom: very unsafe and scared (n14=2.1%), unsafe and scared (n17=2.6%), kind of unsafe (n58=8.9%), kind of safe (n88=13.5%), safe (n226=34.6%), very safe (n241=36.9%).

Going to and from school: very unsafe and scared (n18=2.8%), unsafe and scared (n22=3.4%), kind of unsafe (n42=6.4%), kind of safe (n82=12.6%), safe (n202=30.9%), very safe (n275=42.1%), with 12 non-respondents.

In the bathroom/locker room: very unsafe and scared (n19=2.9%), unsafe and scared (n10=1.5%), kind of unsafe (n46=7.0%), kind of safe (n82=12.6%), safe (n211=32.3%), very safe (n274=42%), with 11 non-respondents.

At before or after school activities: very unsafe and scared (n14=2.1%), unsafe and scared (n14=2.1%), kind of unsafe (n17=2.6%), kind of safe (n53=8.1%), safe (n217=33.2%), very safe (n323=49.5%), with 15 non-respondents.

School climate was assessed by looking at student responses to questions under the heading "What is Your School Like?" The other Students help if they see someone being bullied or harassed: never/hardly ever true (n151=23.1%), sometimes true (n384=58.8%), often true (n89=13.9%), almost always/always true (n25=3.8%), with 4 no responses.

Students tell adults at school when other students are being bullies or harassed: never/hardly ever true (n187=28.6%), sometimes true (n343=52.5%), often true (n99=15.2%), almost always/always true (n19=2.9%), with 5 non-respondents.

If someone is alone during free time, others will include them: never/hardly ever true (n129=19.8%), sometimes true (n282=43.2%), often true (n193=29.6%), almost always/always true (n44=6.7%), with 5 non-respondents.

Students at this school encourage other students to do the best they can at their schoolwork: never/hardly ever true (n187=28.6%), sometimes true (n252=38.6%), often true (n141=21.6%), almost always/always true (n66=10.1%), with 7 non-respondents.

There are clear rules at our school: never/hardly ever true (n49=7.5%), sometimes true (n130=19.9%), often true (n192=29.4%), almost always/always true (n275=42.1%), with 7 non-respondents.

Teachers and staff help if they see someone being bullied or harassed: never/hardly ever true (n37=5.7%), sometimes true (n107=16.4%), often true (n146=22.4%), almost always/always true (n359=55%), with 4 non-respondents.

Students who misbehave take a lot of my teacher's time: never/hardly ever true (n49=7.5%), sometimes true (n144=22.1%), often true (n213=32.6%), almost always/ always true (237=36.3%), with 10 non-respondents.

Adults at this school care that the students do best school work they can: never/hardly ever true (n30=4.6%), sometimes true (n94=14.4%), often true (n184=28.2%), almost always/always true (n338=51.8%), with 7 non-respondents.

My school tries to make everyone feel included: never/hardly ever true (n54=8.3%), sometimes true (n156=23.9%), often true (n221=33.8%), almost always/always true (n213=32.6%), with 9 non-respondents.

I usually can find a person to hang out with in free time: never/hardly ever true (n28=4.3%), sometimes true (n84=12.9%), often true (n148=22.7%), almost always/always true (n389=59.6%), with 4 non-respondents.

When I'm upset, other students try to comfort me or cheer me up: never/hardly ever true (n98=15%), sometimes true (n143=21.9%), often true (n182=27.9%), almost always/always true (n224=34.3%), with 6 non-respondents.

I like going to school: never/hardly ever true (n138=21.1%), sometimes true (n186=28.5%), often true (n183=28%), almost always/always true (n139=21.3%), with 7 non-respondents.

I am afraid to go to school: never/hardly ever true (n536=82.1%), sometimes true (n74=11.3%), often true (n17=2.6%), almost always/always true (n21=3.2%), with 5 non-respondents.

Concerning bullying, students who responded that they witnessed bullying in the past month by responding to the questions under the heading "Have You Seen This Happen?" responses were cross tabulated with questions from the heading "If you heard or saw any of these things happen (check all that apply)".

Of the students who had witnessed bullying at school, stating that they had done nothing to help, resulted in 41.7% (n255), responding that they had not. If they had asked the hurt/teased/left out person to join them, the students response resulted in 64.5% (n395), stating that they had not. If they had helped the hurt/teased/left out person to get away from the bullying, 71.9% (n440) reported no. If the witness had helped the person who was being bullied get new ideas how to handle problem, 33.3% (n204) responded yes, and 66.7% (n408) responded no. The witness got help from an adult at school, students responded 11.9% (n73) yes, and 88.1% (n539) replied no. If the witness stood up to the person who was teasing, 36.1% (n221) stated yes and 63.9% (n391) stated no. If the witness had talked to the hurt/teased/left out person about how they felt, 37.7% (n231) stated, yes and 62.3% (n381) stated, no.

Cross tabulation of students who experienced bullying in the last month and whom they told were performed. Students responded that of those students who were bullied in the last month, they told no one: yes (n223=36%) no (n389=63.9%). Asked if they told a friend: yes (n350=57.2%) no (n262=42.8%). Asked if they told an adult at school: yes (n75=12.3%) no (n537=87.7%). Asked if they told a parent: yes (n105=17.2%) no (n507=82.8%). Asked if they told the bus driver: yes (n16=2.6%) no (n596=97.4%). Asked if they had told some other person: yes (n90=14.7%) no (n522=85.3%).

Cross tabulation of frequency and percentages, with a chi square analysis, between grade level (6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade) and self-reported bullying incidents (Responses under the heading "Has this Happened to You?") (Value=2.710, df=2) showed that the differences between what was expected and observed are not beyond

what would occur by chance. There was no significant correlation between experiencing bullying behavior in the last month and grade level.

Cross tabulation of frequency counts and percentages, with a chi square analysis, between gender (males and females) and self reported bullying incidents (Responses under the heading "Has this Happened to You?") (Value 3.434, df=1) showed that the difference between what was expected and observed were close to but not beyond what would occur by chance. There is no significant correlation between experiencing bullying behavior in the last month and gender.

Students were asked to respond to situations that had happened to them at school in regards to bullying behavior. Students were able to answer never, less than one time per week, one time per week, 2 to four times per week, and five or more times per week for each situation. Students responded that they were hit, pushed, or kicked on purpose at the following frequencies: never (60.8% = n394), less than one time per week (22.2%=n145), one time per week (6.6% =n43), two to four times per week (7.7%=n50), 5 or more times per week (2.5%=n16).

The second scenario asked students if they had mean things said to them, were teased or called names, and the following frequencies were observed: never (46.1%=n301), less than one time per week (26.3%=n172) one time per week (8.6%=n56), two to four times per week (11.3%=n74), 5 or more times per week (6.9%=n45).

The third scenario asked students if someone told stories about them that were not true: never (58.2%=n380), less than one time per week (22.1%=n144) one time per week

(8.7%=n57), two to four times per week (7.2%=n47), 5 or more times per week (3.2%=n21).

The fourth scenario asked students if they experienced not being included in what others were doing: never (57.6%=n376), less than one time per week (25.7%=n168) one time per week (6.9%=n45), two to four times per week (5.1%=n33), 5 or more times per week (4.0%=n26).

The fifth scenario asked students if they experienced someone taking things that belong to them: never (64.9=n424), less than one time per week (23.1%=n151) one time per week (6.3%=n41), two to four times per week (3.5%=n23), 5 or more times per week (1.1%=n7).

The sixth scenario asked if students were threatened to be hurt or take things from them: never (46.1%=n301), less than one time per week (26.3%=n172) one time per week (8.6%=n56), two to four times per week (11.3%=n74), 5 or more times per week (6.9%=n45).

Chapter 5

Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will review the purpose of this study and the methodology used. In addition, this chapter will address the significance of the study, conclusions drawn from the results, and recommendations for further research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze data gathered from a previously administered survey (February, 2005) of the student body of Menomonie Middle School regarding school climate, safety and bullying behaviors. It was hoped that this study would reveal if there existed a correlation between a student's grade level and the number of reported instances of bullying, and/or a correlation between a student's gender and the number of reported instances of bullying.

The data showed that the differences between what was expected and observed in regards to number of reporting bullying and grade level are not beyond what would occur by chance. There is no significant correlation between experiencing bullying behavior in the last month and grade level. The null hypothesis could not be rejected. The research seems to indicate that students who report that they experience bullying are not defined by their grade level (Ma, 2002). The data from this survey seems to support that earlier finding.

The data also showed that the differences between what was expected and what was observed in regards to number of bullying incidents and gender are not beyond what would occur by chance. There was no significant correlation between experiencing

bullying behavior and gender. However, the level is very close and shows that there might be a trend in regards to bullying and gender, with more females reporting bullying incidents than that of males. A recommendation for future research would be to reassess this population to see if the trend shows statistical significance. The current data seems to indicate that females may be more likely to experience and report bullying behavior than that of males, with 72.8% of males and 79% of females reporting experiencing bullying incidents within the last month.

The study in addition looked to report where at Menomonie Middle School bullying incidents occurred. The data showed that students at Menomonie Middle School reported that bullying occurs more in the lunchroom and hallways (54% of the students reported being bullied) than anywhere else in the building. This seems to be concurrent with current literature that states bullying behaviors happen more often in areas where adult supervision is limited (Harris & Petrie, 2003, Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005). A recommendation for educators would be in increase the presence of adult supervision in areas of the school where large numbers of students are assembled. Students report that they are more likely to experience bullying when adults are not present or when adults are overwhelmed by too many students to focus on isolated bullying incidents (Smokowshi & Kopaz, 2005).

The study furthermore looked at how students reported school safety. The student perceived safety of a school shows the connection of students to that school. Students stated that overall they felt their school to be safe to very safe; even when asked about the safety of the lunch room and hallways, students responded that over 70% of the students felt safe or very safe in the lunchroom. Students also reported that 82% are not afraid of

going to school. However, this also shows that there is a sizeable percentage, 18%, which seem to be afraid of going to school. There is not an acceptable reason for students to not to feel safe at their school. A recommendation for educators would be to continue current programs that allow for students to experience an overall feeling of safety at their school, with a focus on the percentage of the population that still does not feel safe coming to school.

In addition, the study looked at bystander involvement and student acceptance as measures of school climate. School climate highlighted a problem that seems to be prevalent in the literature, lack of bystander involvement. The data showed that when students experienced another student being bullied, 81% of the students report not helping or coming to the aid of the other student being bullied. The indifference of the bystander leads to the recommendation that educators at this school and others need a program that involves all students in the eradication of bullying. Olweus (2001) suggested that if the bystanders become involved and do not allow for the bullying to occur, then the bullying behavior decreases. Bonds & Stoker (2000), mention that if the school becomes a caring community, where all the students respect one another and come to the aid of each other, bullying will decrease. The silent majority is not silent any longer and takes back the power and control that the bully exerted over the victim and the bystanders.

The school climate items also highlighted concerns about student acceptance of others. Students who feel isolated at school are more likely to become victims of bullying or be bullies themselves (Gamliel et al., 2003). The data showed that a majority of students reported that they were reluctant to tell adults when bullying occurred, they

were reluctant to include others who are alone during free time, and reluctant to encourage others to do their best in school work.

Students who experienced the bullying reported that they did not feel that they could tell others about the incident. The students reported that following the bullying instances in the past month, an overwhelming number did not disclose the incident to any adult. Slightly over half of the students did report that they talked about the incident with another friend.

Conclusions

The present study found no significant correlation between grade level and the number of instances of self-reported bullying behavior. Previous research had noted that students in middle school received more bullying than that of elementary school and high school but had not specifically looked at grade level 6th, 7th, or 8th. The current data of this study seems to show that bullying instances occur at a similar rate for all three grade levels.

The present study also found no significant correlation between gender and number of self-reported bullying behaviors. However, the chi squared value is very close to the values of significance for the .05 level, and there seems to be a possible trend between gender and self-reporting bullying instances, with females reporting bullying instances more often than that of males. In this case the previous literature describes types of bullying incidents that occur primarily by one gender or the other, but not how many times each gender experienced bullying

Recommendations

The ideas that follow are areas of this study that could be explored further by educators and researchers.

Recommendations for educators:

1. Awareness of student reluctance to disclose bullying instances with adults in school. Faculty, staff and administration need to be trained to educate and evaluate bullying, and about how to be responsive to both victims and perpetrators.

2. Awareness of areas in the school where adult to student ratio is greatly out numbered. In hallways, lunchrooms, and school grounds bullying instances occur more frequently than in areas where there is more adult presence. Increase of caring and connected adults to the students in these areas might cut down on the number of bullying incidents in these areas.

3. In the area of bystanders, schools might want to adopt programs that make for a school community that does not allow for bullying to exist, involving the bystander in making the school a safe place where bullying behaviors are not tolerated.

4. Implementation of a comprehensive school-wide anti-bullying program. Although the percentages described a majority of students were not experiencing bullying on a regular basis, the 2-10% that experience it on a daily basis or more are the high risk population. Schools should not discount this population, rather should find ways to reduce the negative behaviors. The comprehensive program

might also highlight staff role modeling, bystander involvement, victim coping skills, and bully behavior change.

Recommendations for future researchers include:

1. A survey that had a defined validity and reliability would make for a more comprehensive survey. The survey used to collect the data did not have any published reliability or validity.

2. As stated earlier, replication of the survey with the same or similar sample would be beneficial to see if there was a correlation between gender and number of reported bullying cases. This is a recommendation after seeing that the relationship was very close to being statistically significant in the present study.

3. Replication of this study in another middle school or multiple middle schools would be beneficial to see if the trends are isolated just for Menomonie Middle School, especially the trends involving a high report of school safety and low reports of bystander assistance.

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Appendix A

MENOMONIE MIDDLE SCHOOL
School District of the Menomonie Area
920 21st Street South • Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751 • TEL (715) 232-1673 • FAX (715) 232-5486
School District Web Page • http://www.msd.k12.wi.us

February 14, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as verification that Troy A. Schimek received data "already collected" by the Menomonie Middle School. This data was in the form of a Bully Prevention Survey conducted by the middle school's Safety and Respect Climate Committee. Troy acted as our consultant after the data was collected. Troy processed this data and compiled a report for our staff. Menomonie Middle School has authorized permission for Troy to utilize this data for his graduate study program. Menomonie Middle School also authorizes the mentioning of the school by name within Troy's thesis.

We thank Troy for his efforts and wish him luck throughout his educational career.

Sincerely,

Stacey J. Everson
Assistant Principal

". . . preparing ALL students to become lifelong learners, caring individuals and responsible citizens."

Appendix B

School _____   Code _____

Date _____

Menomonie Student Report

This set of questions asks you to tell about your school and things that may or may not have happened to you at school. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer the questions to show what you think about your school.

Has This Happened to You?

For the following, check only **ONE** box for each item.

During the *past month* other students:	never	less than 1 time per week	1 time per week	2–4 times per week	5 or more times per week
Hit, pushed, or kicked me on purpose					
Said mean things, teased me, or called me names					
Told stories about me that were not true					
Did not include me in what they were doing					
Took things that belong to me					
Threatened to hurt me or take things					
Touched, grabbed, or pinched me in a sexual way that was unwanted					
Made negative comments of a sexual nature about me					
Said mean things, teased me, or called me names because of my race or ethnicity					
Wrote notes, spread rumors, or wrote graffiti of a sexual nature about me					

If any of these happened to you (**check all that apply**):

What did you do?

I got help from an adult at school		I got help from my parents	
I got help from another student		I ignored it or walked away	
I hit, kicked, or pushed back		I told them to stop	
I said mean things, teased, or called them names		I tried to stop them by saying or doing something funny	
I told the person I agreed with what he or she said about me		I said things to myself to help me feel better	
I avoided the person so I would not get hurt or teased again		I did nothing	

Who was it done by?	a girl	
	a boy	
	a group	

Who did you tell?	no one	
	a friend	
	an adult at school	
	a parent	
	bus driver	
	other	

Where did it happen?	classroom	
	school grounds	
	hallways/lunchroom	
	going to and from school	
	bathroom/locker room	
	before or after school activity	

Have You Seen This Happen?

For the following, check only ONE box for each item.

(Check the box ONLY if the item happened to someone else (not to you)).

During the *past month*:	never	less than 1 time per week	1 time per week	2–4 times per week	5 or more times per week
I saw someone get hit, pushed, or kicked on purpose by other students					
I heard students say mean things, tease, or call someone names					
I heard students tell stories about someone that were not true					
I saw students not let someone join in what they were doing					
I saw or heard that students took things that belong to someone else					
I heard students threaten to hurt someone or take their things					
I saw someone get touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way that was unwanted					
I heard students make negative comments of a sexual nature about somebody					
I heard students say mean things, tease, or call someone names because of their race or ethnicity					
I saw notes, heard rumors, or saw graffiti of a sexual nature about someone					

If you heard or saw any of these things happen (**check all that apply**):

What did you do?

I did nothing	
I asked the person who was hurt/teased/left out to join me	
I helped the person who was hurt/teased/left out to get away	
I helped the person come up with ideas about how to handle the problem	

I got help from an adult at school	
I stood up to the person who was teasing	
I talked to the person who was hurt/teased/left out about how he/she felt	

Who was it done by?

a girl	
a boy	
a group	

Who did you tell?

no one	
a friend	
an adult at school	
a parent	
bus driver	
other	

Where did it happen?

classroom	
school grounds	
hallways/lunchroom	
going to and from school	
bathroom/locker room	
before or after school activity	

How Safe Do You Feel?

During the **past month**, this is how safe I felt in each of these places (check only **ONE** box for each):

	very unsafe & scared	unsafe & scared	kind of unsafe	kind of safe	safe	very safe
In the classroom						
On the school grounds						
In the hallways and lunchroom						
Going to and from school						
In the bathroom/locker room						
At before or after school activities						

What Is Your School Like?

Check the **ONE** box that best describes you/your school:

	never/ hardly ever true	sometimes true	often true	almost always/ always true
The other students help if they see someone being bullied or harassed				
Students tell adults at school when other students are being bullied or harassed				
If someone is alone during free time, others will include them				
Students at this school encourage other students to do the best they can at their schoolwork				
There are clear rules at our school				
The teachers and staff help if they see someone being bullied or harassed				
Students who misbehave take a lot of my teacher's time				
Adults at this school care that the students do the best school work they can				
My school tries to make everyone feel included				
I usually can find someone to hang out with during free time				
When I'm upset, other students try to comfort me or cheer me up				
I like going to school				
I am afraid to go to school				

Grade: _____   I am a: Boy ☐   Girl ☐

I usually go to and from school by:

(check only one)

walking	
bike	
car	
bus	

I am:

Asian	
African American	
Hispanic	
Native American	
White	

(check all that apply)

Other: _____