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The high cost of bullying

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to understand there are not simple solutions towards prevention of bullying. Anti-bullying programs are being implemented throughout the world, and their effectiveness will depend on the commitment of those involved. Bullying is about power; an imbalance of power. Bullying occurs when an individual intentionally inflicts pain on someone else through physical, verbal, or social aggression. Characteristics of the victim and the bully are reviewed along with consequences of each role. Interventions, such as Social Skills Training (SST) as well as empowerment strategies targeting the victims of bullying are useful. But the most effective method is the whole school approach. Counselors are able to meet the needs of the victims, bullies, and their families.

THE HIGH COST OF BULLYING

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Ramona J. Schmidt

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to understand there are not simple solutions towards prevention of bullying. Anti-bullying programs are being implemented throughout the world, and their effectiveness will depend on the commitment of those involved. Bullying is about power, an imbalance of power. Bullying occurs when an individual intentionally inflicts pain on someone else through physical, verbal, or social aggression. Characteristics of the victim and the bully are reviewed along with consequences of each role. Interventions, such as Social Skills Training (SST) as well as empowerment strategies targeting the victims of bullying are useful, but the most effective method is the whole school approach. Counselors are able to meet the needs of the victims, bullies, and their families.

Running Head: COST OF BULLYING

It is no longer acceptable for society to ignore bullying, which is a problem that continues to increase. The problems surrounding bullying are not simple, nor are they black or white, but are best understood as on a continuum (Rigby, 2002). The consequences of being bullied are real and happen each and every day to students in all schools. According to Smith and Brain (2000), the bully-victim relationship is seen as normative, but it is not socially acceptable behavior. There has never been a significant span of time where even adults lived peacefully one with another. According to the Bible the first account of aggressive behavior occurred when Cain rose up and killed his brother, Abel (Rigby, 2002).

A survey completed by American children age eight to fifteen, revealed they consider bullying to be a more serious problem than drug and alcohol use, racism and feeling pressured to have sex (Lyznicke, McCaffree, & Robinowitz, 2004). The effect from being bullied may have short-term consequences such as poor school attendance, lack of concentration and the ability to do well in school, physical symptoms, and low self-esteem. Other consequences are felt over time by the individuals themselves and may include depression, anxiety or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The results of a recent study linked being a victim of bullying during their school years with being victimized while at work. The study, the first of its kind surveyed 5,288 adults in a wide range of

employment areas (Smith, Singer, Monika, Hoel, Helge, & Cooper, Cary, 2003). Children who bully are at risk towards committing more serious acts of violence, drug and alcohol use and a higher risk for committing crimes leading to prison (Lyznicki, 2004). Since bullying flourishes in adult settings such as: prisons, the workplace, nursing homes, and even within our families, there is an overwhelming need to review literature regarding this topic, as it has the potential to impact many lives.

This paper will provide facts concerning bullying. It will identify some of the many risk factors that promote aggressive behaviors in children, such as television viewing, the importance of the family, and the overall message that society sends to its members. The paper will review characteristics a bully or a victim might possess, as well as negative consequences that may result. Olweus (1993) has developed a prevention program known as an all school approach that will be presented along with other interventions that are also being utilized in some schools.

Research began in earnest by Olweus (1993) in the early 1970's. His research was conducted in Scandinavia, but soon other countries began to take notice of the effect bullying had; not only on the victims, bullies, and bystanders, but how the impact was felt by all members of society (Olweus, 1993).

As Olweus (1993) tackled this huge topic he began surveying students directly to obtain information on bullying. Olweus (1993) designed an

anonymous bully / victim survey that he gave to students. Surveys were designed for students in grades first to fourth, fifth to ninth, and one for the higher grades. The survey provided students with a definition of bullying behavior and the times in which bullying occurred. Students were given specific answers to choose from such as “about once a week” or “several times a week” instead of vague answers such as “often” or “very often” which were seen as more subjective (Olweus, 1993, p. 11). If bullying occurred in which there were bystanders present, students were asked to write down the bystanders reactions to the bullying behavior (Olweus, 1993). His findings in 1983 showed that 84,000 students were either victims or the bully in Norwegian’s elementary and junior high schools. This meant that one out of seven students was either a bully or a victim (Olweus, 1993).

What is Bullying?

Definition

When referring to bullying behavior it is like an umbrella over which all forms of bullying behavior fall. In an attempt to be more specific researchers have tried to define bullying. Ross (as cited in Davis, 2005) defined bullying using the following quote:

Bullying is a form of social interaction--not necessarily longstanding-- in which a more dominate individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behavior that is intended to, and does, in fact, cause distress to a less dominate

individual (the victim). The aggressive behavior may take the form of a direct physical and / or verbal attack or may be indirect. More than one bully and more than one victim may participate in the interaction (p. 9).

Direct Bullying

Bullying is a form of aggression, and always involves an imbalance of power (Juvonen, 2005). Bullying behavior fall into two categories. Direct bullying, according to Olweus (1993) is likened to an open attack. Examples that fall in this category would refer to: hitting, kicking, use of insults, threats and offensive language. Physical aspects of bullying are more visible to everyone and may be seen as more substantial, the effect of name-calling may be given less attention.

Indirect Bullying

Other forms of bullying behavior fall into the second category. These behaviors are seen as subtle and may be viewed by parents or teachers as part of growing up. Indirect bullying is not as visible, but its effect is often more painful than direct bullying. Examples of indirect are: being excluded from friends, talking behind the intended victims backs, and spreading rumors about them (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2003, & Rigby, & Camodeca, & Goossens, 2005).

Facts Concerning Bullying

Although a wealth of information has been discovered by Olweus (1993) the facts concerning bullying are confusing to many. Juvonen (2005) has found teachers, parents and children view bullying as a problem that only affects bullies and their victims. This is not true. By observing behavior of children on a playground it was found that 85% of bullying was witnessed by at least four peers. The witnesses are known as bystander bullies and play a role in bullying. The bystander bully does not initiate the behavior but by choosing to ignore the behavior, it sends a message to the bully which is the same as showing approval (Juvonen, 2005).

According to the National Education Association, 160,000 students will be absent each day due to bullying (Borba, 1999). Students should not have to fear going to school each day. Likewise parents should have confidence that their children's safety is taken seriously and given a high priority by the teachers and staff.

Another common misconception is that most bullying behavior takes place while students are going to and from school. Statistics find that two to three times more bullying actually occurs while students are at school. Bullying occurs at recess, in the school yard, hallways, bathrooms, buses, and even in the classroom. These are not remote areas, but where there is a high possibility of

others being able to witness the bully in action (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Factors Influencing Aggressive Behavior

The Family

There is not any one reason that can be blamed for why a child chooses to bully others. Parents have the responsibility for laying the groundwork for children in regard to modeling appropriate attitudes and behavior towards others. Children have a tendency to model what they see. They are constantly aware of how conflict is handled and the methods that seem to produce results (Rigby, 2002, Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004).

Research has found risk factors that increase the likelihood or a tendency towards bullying. A correlation has been found linking aggressive parenting with children who will become aggressive towards their peers, even as early as pre-school. Permissive parenting may also result in children displaying anti-social aggressive behaviors towards others. Negative attitudes held by parents affect the emotional well being of children whose parents show minimal warmth through their daily interactions with their children (Unnever, 2005, Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000). Fox and Boulton (2003) found not only parenting styles to be risk factors for children who bully, but also early attachment towards their caretaker.

Children form their belief system at a young age. It is made up of what a child sees and hears daily and has the potential to be altered. A lack of positive parenting, encouragement and a sense of humor will leave an imprint on a young life (Rigby & Roberts, 2000). Baldry and Farrington (2000) noted that the parenting style known as authoritarian favored physical discipline. Corvo and Williams (2000) suggested a possible link towards aggressive behavior and a students perceptions of how their parents would view their involvement in an act of aggression. They found that students were less inclined towards acts of aggression if they knew their parents would hold them accountable for their behavior.

Child's Self-concept

Research has shown that self-concept is a powerful factor towards predicting bullying behavior. Self-concept is directly tied to the family environment, precisely parental discord in the home. A study was conducted by Christie-Mizell (2000) examining how interparental conflict had an impact on elementary and middle school children's self-concept towards bullying. The findings suggest marital conflict in the home does not produce positive self-concept for children. The findings illustrate bullying needs to be addressed through interventions directed at the needs of the victim, bully, bystanders, school administrators, teachers, peers and should also incorporate the family.

Aggression

Since bullying is a form of aggression, it is also important to take a look at other sources that contribute to a child's tendency towards violence. A study that was conducted in the United States found a connection between bullying and the amount of time children spent watching television. Zimmerman (2005) tracked 1,266 children starting at the age of four till age eleven. The results showed that 13% of the children were identified as bullies by their own mothers. Since young children are easily affected by the content of television, parents are strongly encouraged to limit the amount of time spent watching television (Thompson, 2005). Results indicated if four year olds sat in front of the television for five hours they would later go on to bully. Results indicated that this was an increase of two hours more of television viewing by children who did not become bullies. The findings of this study also revealed factors that could reduce the risk of bullying. These included mental and emotional support given by their parents to their children, such as parents reading to their children, spending time with their children and eating meals together as a family (Bullying Awareness Network).

As children enter elementary school they are usually watching 2 ½ hours of television per day. The number of hours increase to around four by adolescence, and the average between two and three during their teen years (Singer, Flannery, Guo, Miller, & Leibbrandt, 2004). Research suggests students

who watch a lot of violence either from television, video games or movies are often more aggressive and are not able to demonstrate empathy towards victims of aggressive actions (Olweus, 1993).

Davis (2005) found students who identify with the hero of a show may still be receiving negative messages especially if the hero uses violent or aggressive behavior to conquer the “bad guys.” An example of this concept was illustrated by four kindergarten students who missed recess because of punching and kicking others. When asked what their favorite television show was, they replied, “Walker, Texas Ranger.”

Society

Society has been unconcerned about the problem of bullying for too long. No one took it seriously, except those who had dedicated their time and research in the area of bullying. Teachers made light of it, not thinking it was a huge problem. There were some in society who thought bullying was merely a rite of passage that all children must endure and experience (Limper, 2000). Members of society are not quick to change. Another illustration where society seemed to tolerate inappropriate behavior among its members was in the area of sexual harassment. Society has taken measures that proclaim sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Society has taken steps towards implementing programs in schools that proclaim they realize bullying behavior is taken serious (Singer, Flannery, Guo, Miller, & Leibbrandt, 2004).

The Bully

Characteristics

A basic characteristic of a bully is their tendency towards aggressive acts, not only towards their peers but even with their parents and their teachers. Their attitude towards violence is more positive than non bullies. They have a need to dominate or manipulate others, and they lack empathy towards their victims (Olweus, 1993).

A common myth is that the bully is only aggressive and tough acting on the outside, but just below the surface lies an individual who is insecure and anxious. Although this may be a reasonable assumption, Olweus (1993) findings do not support these views. Bullies do not score low in the area of self-esteem.

Bullies are generally well-liked, and admired, especially in the lower grades. These attitudes change by the time students near ninth grade, when bullying behavior is not seen to be favorable by peers. Physical strength is admired by society, and for this reason, most bullies are physically strong, whereas their targets are seen as weak (Olweus, 1993).

Consequences of being a bully

Bullies will pay a price for their behavior. According to research that was conducted by Dake, Price, & Telljohann (2003) their findings indicate bullies were more prone to engage in high- risk activities, such as: fighting, alcohol and tobacco use. There was also a correlation between being a bully and skipping

school, police involvement, stealing, cheating on tests, vandalism and concealing weapons (Davis, 2005). Another interesting finding reveals that being a bully will affect dating relationships. A bully usually begins to date earlier than most of their peers. The very need for dominating others carries over and they may become more physical and verbally aggressive towards those they date (Davis, 2005).

The Victim

Characteristics

Research findings are still mixed when it comes to the physical characteristics of victims of those who engage in bullying behavior. Olweus (1993) did not find any relationship linking physical impairments such as eyesight, speech and hearing or obesity, personal hygiene, posture, dress or facial expression to students who would likely become a victim. The only physical characteristic Olweus's (1993) research found to be true was related to the size of the individual. Victims tended to be smaller in stature and were seen as weaker (Olweus, 1993). Lowenstein (1997) however found victims possessed more odd mannerisms as well as more physical disabilities. He also discovered that the attractiveness of the victim appeared to be below normal (Dake, Price, Telljohann, 2003, & Bernstein, & Watson, 1997). Victims usually are lonely and have a tendency towards social isolation. They suffer from low self-esteem and may

resort to crying when there is conflict between peers (Olweus, 1993, Camodeca, & Goossens, 2005).

Consequence of being a victim

Depending on the view an individual holds concerning bullying, many do not even consider that bullying may result in long term consequences for the victim such as posttraumatic stress disorder. A study conducted by Joseph (2005) revealed that 40% of the 331 students in England who took part in the survey had at some time had been bullied at school and one third of those same students may suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (Bullying Awareness Network, 2005). A short-term consequence of being bullied is the fear of going to school where the bullying is taking place. As a result, absenteeism will occur or victims may be unable to concentrate on their class work when they are at school (Bernstein, & Watson, 1997).

Feelings of loneliness and anxiety may set in. Depression and suicidal ideation are even more likely to be an outcome as a result of indirect bullying (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003). A common and often quoted phrase to children "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me" is far from the truth. Physical ailments are felt as well: problems sleeping, bed wetting, an increase in headaches, stomach aches, and a lack of energy (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003).

Interventions

Being a part of the bully / victim relationship is cause for alarm. Too many people pay the price of what some regard as merely a rite of growing up. Olweus (1993) has spent years researching this growing problem that is seen in the schools, workplace, and may be displayed in the family they may eventually form as an adult.

Dake, Price, & Telljohann (2003) have found a way of dealing with bullying behavior, that includes the bully, victim, peers, school staff, and parents. In the early 1980's, Olweus evaluated the "whole school approach" by use of a longitudinal study. The findings of this study showed the number of bullies and victims was reduced by 50%. Victims often feel vulnerable, helpless and powerless towards those who bully them. There have been many approaches that use empowerment strategies focusing on methods that promote power back to the victims of bullies. (Randall, 1997). Implementing assertiveness skills workshops by themselves have not been affective in dealing with all of the components of bullying behavior. Focusing on assertiveness skills with the victims of bullying sends the message to the victim that they are to blame for the bullying behavior.

A social skills training (SST) program that focuses on identifying and promoting social skills for victims of bullying has been developed. Risk factors were examined, such as characteristics of families, parenting styles, and behavioural factors (social skills) were noted as characteristics of victims of

bullies. The areas that were promoted that fall under social skills are developing a positive outlook on life, relaxation techniques, and the ability to problem-solve. A study by researchers Fox and Boulton (2003) revealed the overall effectiveness of using the SST program. Twenty eight children around the age of nine and ten took part in the study. The findings suggest that there was an increase in the self-esteem of the students. A follow-up three months later continued to show positive results in the area of self-esteem.

Individual strategies such as these have merit of their own and are considered to be useful, but are not as effective when used alone in reducing bullying behavior. Numerous researchers point to a whole school approach, meaning incorporating the school community, society, teachers, parents, and all of the students within the school (Smith, Lyznicki, MPH, Chaffee & Robinowitz, 2004,. Fox, & Boulton, Weddle, 2003).

Bullying Prevention Program

In 1982, a shocking event took place that opened the eyes of the public to the horror of what bullying can lead to. Three young Norwegian boys committed suicide due to intense bullying. This event caused the nation to take notice and led to Dan Olweus' intervention program (Davis, 2005). The effectiveness of the program was tested by the involvement of 2,500 students in Bergen, Norway. Forty two schools were involved, with ages ranging from 11- 14 years of age. As a result of this program, results showed bullying had declined by as much as 50%.

What stands out in the success of this program is that there is a team effort towards the prevention of bullying.

Students

Students play an important role in being able to correctly identify important and useful pieces of information that may provide additional insight into bullying behavior. One of the first steps is to allow the students to have a voice by giving them a survey. Students identify how often bullying occurs, where specific areas of bullying occur, and what are some typical responses of teachers or other school personnel who may witness bullying behavior (Davis, 2005). This will provide a wealth of current information specific to their schools.

Students will be involved in social skills, and assertiveness skills groups depending on their needs. Victims will be encouraged and supported, realizing that they are not to blame and are not alone as they deal with the consequences of bullying behavior. The students who are identified as bullies will be held accountable for their actions. Consequences will be enforced concerning specific acts of bullying. Another area that would be promoted is that of "friendship teams". These teams would seek out students who seem lonely or more socially isolated as a way of reaching out and making new friendships (Davis, 2005)

Parents

It is advantageous that parents and schools learn to support each other and work together. This collaboration will form a strong cohesive bond that will

contribute to promoting the safety and well-being of all students. It is important to keep parents well informed at all times. They need to know they and their children are being treated fairly by the teachers and the staff. By encouraging parents to take an active role in their child's life, the parents will see themselves as an important link towards working together with the school instead of feeling blamed for the problem (Davis, 2005).

Schools

The results from the student survey will reveal the specific areas that need to be addressed at the individual schools. Teachers and all school personnel would take part in discussion and training groups on ways to prevent bullying. The next step would incorporate school policies on bullying and the appropriate consequences of bullying behavior. These policies would be well known to the students as well as to their parents even before a problem begins.

Conclusion

Up until lately bullying behavior was not taken seriously. Headlines have made public school shootings that in some cases implicated that the students involved in the shooting had been victims of bullying growing up. It has never been enough to simply target the bully or look for ways of helping the victims. As a result of Olweus' (1993) thorough research in the area of bullying, the public has taken notice. School safety has been looked at, not only by the local school districts; but has reached the attention of the public resulting in more awareness

and an understanding of what some of the consequences of bullying behavior are for those affected. It takes committed teachers, parents, students and society to stand together against bullying.

The consequences of bullying may have long term effects not only on the victims, but the bullies themselves, and their families. The effects ripple down from the individual to their families, the work place and into our community. School counselors as well as mental health counselors can be effective towards meeting students' mental and emotional needs (Randall, 1997).

Family counseling could be offered to parents who are desperate for help. A report was published by Charity Parentline Plus, revealed that 80% of parents who called a 24 hour hotline admitted that there were high levels of conflict at home with their child and 69% of those parents stated that their child exhibited high levels of anger (Bullying Awareness Network, 2004). The success or failure of anti-bullying programs lies with the commitment level of all. Society must work as a team towards the good of all of its' members.

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