

**The Impact of an Anti-Bullying Program on the Prevalence of
Bullying in Junior and Senior High School**

by
Beaton J. Walsh

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NORTH CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

**THE IMPACT OF AN ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAM
ON THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING
IN JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

A Dissertation submitted to
the graduate Faculty of the Department of Psychology
In candidacy for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Name: **Beaton J. Walsh** **Degree:** **Doctor of Philosophy**

Major Field: **Psychology** **Awarded:**

Institution: **North Central University** **Location:** **Prescott, Arizona**

Title of Dissertation: **THE IMPACT OF AN ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAM
ON THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING IN JUNIOR
AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

Scope of Study: This dissertation examines the impact of an anti-bullying program on the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high school. Three research questions were posed:

1. Will an anti-bullying program reduce the prevalence of bullying in Junior (Grades 7-9) and Senior High (Grades 10-12) school?
2. Will the program be more effective at the Junior or Senior High school level?
3. Are there gender issues related to the effectiveness of the program (i.e., do males or females benefit more from the implementation of the program)?

Findings and Conclusions:

Data collected and analyzed to address the above questions suggest that the anti-bullying program was ineffective in reducing the prevalence of bullying at the junior and senior high school level. The treatment group at St. Bernard's School did not show any statistically significant changes when compared to the control group at Jacques Fontaine School.

When grade was analyzed in the treatment group as a factor on the impact of the program, in all but one of the questions examined, there was little in the way of statistical significance to report. In the one question where significance was observed, students at the grade 10-12 level reported a lower level of bullying than their grade 7-9 counterparts.

In addition, when gender was examined in the treatment group as a factor on the impact of the anti-bullying program, no statistical significance was observed. Thus, it would appear the anti-bullying program chosen for this study was ineffective in reducing the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high school students.

Chair's Approval: _____ Date: _____

**NORTH CENTRAL UNIVERSITY
APPROVAL**

We, the undersigned, certify we have read this dissertation and approve it as adequate in scope and qualify for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Learner: Beaton J. Walsh

Title of Dissertation: The Impact of an Anti-Bully Program on the Prevalence of Bullying in Junior and Senior High School.

Dissertation Committee:

Chair (Type name and degree)	Date
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Member (Type name and degree)	Date
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Member (Type name and degree)	Date
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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to Lajoie, McLellan, and Seddon (1997) “bullying is one of the most underrated and enduring problems in schools today” (p. 15). The ground-breaking work of Olweus (1978) first brought this problem to light. More recently, however, with the concern regarding violence in schools, this topic has generated a significant amount of research. While the literature on bullying has grown significantly over the past decade, little research has been published from a North American perspective (Hoover & Hazler, 1991; Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler 1995). Research in the area of bullying originated in Scandinavia in the 1970s. Today, the majority of research continues to stem from European countries. However, an extensive amount of research has also been conducted by Ken Rigby, Ph.D. and Philip Slee, Ph.D. in Australia. Only a limited number of studies on the prevalence of bullying from a Canadian perspective have been located in the literature.

Statement of the Problem

Given the above, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of an anti-bullying program on the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high school. While there is a significant amount of literature describing bullying and various interventions designed to reduce its prevalence, there is little in the way of actual experimental research in this area. Most studies, according to Olweus (1991), designed to evaluate the effects of intervention programs to reduce bullying at a building and district level are mostly anecdotal reports with limited outcome data.

Research Questions

This study addressed the question: What is the impact of an anti-bullying program on the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high school? Three research questions were posed:

1. Will an anti-bullying program reduce the prevalence of bullying in junior (grades 7-9) and senior high (grades 10-12) school?
2. Will the program be more effective at the junior or senior high school level?
3. Are there gender issues related to the effectiveness of the program (i.e., do males or females benefit more from the implementation of the program)?

Definition of Terms

Bully. For the purpose of this study, a bully was defined as someone who uses his/her power, either physical or psychological, to cause distress in the victim.

Victim. For the purpose of this study, a victim was defined as someone who experiences repeated bullying episodes.

Bullying. It was the intent of this researcher to obtain consistent responses on the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high students. To this end, the definition of bullying used by Ken Rigby, Ph.D. in his Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire (PRAQ) was utilized in the study. Rigby (1997) calls it bullying “When someone is repeatedly hurting or frightening someone weaker than themselves for no good reason. This may be done in different ways: by hurtful teasing, threatening actions or gestures, name-calling or hitting or kicking” (p. 2). Although some of the above terms are

ambiguous, the victim would determine whether or not a bullying incident had actually taken place.

Junior High School. For the purpose of this study, Junior High School is defined as including grades seven through nine.

Senior High School. For the purpose of this study, Senior High School is defined as including grades ten through twelve.

Brief Review of Related Literature

According to Batsche and Knoff (1994) “...bullying contributes to the serious problem of making school a place to be feared for many students. Effective schooling can not occur under conditions of intimidation and fear” (p. 169). If schools are going to be a safe, positive, and supportive learning environments, says Pepler, Craig, Ziegler & Charach (1994), “we must eliminate the threats of verbal and physical harassment that pervade some children’s lives” (p. 109). Batsche and Knoff (1994), also believe that in order for bullying to be reduced significantly, “...schools must send a strong message to students and staff that bullying is inappropriate” (p.170). These authors further contend that “...schools must promote the idea that adults will be supportive of victims and that school officials can provide a safe haven for all students while at school” (p. 170). Horne, Glaser and Sayger (1994) have indicated five reasons why they believe school personnel must address the bullying problem within the schools early and with determination. They include:

1. While the percentage of students engaging in bullying behavior may be steady, school populations are on the rise resulting in an increasing number of aggressive children.
2. Unaddressed aggression behavior tends to escalate with age, resulting in greater costs in physical and personal damage over time.
3. Bullying impacts the ability of victims to learn and grow in the school environment.
4. Schools should advocate safe environments and provide security for students in their care.
5. Parents are beginning to turn to courts with charges of negligence when schools fail to provide a safe environment for their children.

An informal survey of 21 schools serviced by the Burin Peninsula School Board, Newfoundland, Canada, found no school had an established policy or anti-bullying code. Does a lack of such a policy reflect an absence of bullying, or does it reflect an attitude of ignorance or denial? Branwhite (1994) contends that "...bullying is an insidious problem-a skeleton in the cupboard of contemporary education" (p. 60). In a similar vein, Besag (1989), describes bullying as "one of the dark, hidden areas of social interaction, along with child physical and sexual abuse and adolescence violence in the home, which has thrived on a bed of secrecy and which has been neglected by professional investigation" (p. x). One way this 'bed of secrecy' can be uncovered is for schools to adopt a proactive stance in dealing with the issue of bullying. Schools, says Branwhite (1994), need to "...become more responsive to the needs of those children who have identified themselves,

or have been identified by others, as victims of bullying” (p. 60). The first step in the intervention process says Charach et al., (1995) “...is the development of a school policy with clearly stated rules against bullying” (p. 17). Central to the establishment of such a policy is to address bullying at the whole school, classroom, and individual level (Olweus, 1989). Charach et al., (1995) contend that such an intervention “...must be a collaborative effort of teachers and parents and students” (p. 17). In addition, Pepler et al., (1994) feel that by implementing such a collaborative approach, schools can have “...the potential to reduce aggression, coercion, and violence and thereby improve the relationships within our communities and within our society” (p.109).

Highlights of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of an anti-bullying program on the prevalence of bullying in junior and senior high school students. Two schools, (located on the Burin Peninsula in the province of Newfoundland, Canada), St. Bernard’s School and Jacques Fontaine School, located within a geographical distance of 2 km were chosen for participation in the study.

The experimental design chosen for this study was the pretest-posttest control group design. At the beginning of the study, students from each school were pretested on the dependent variable, prevalence of bullying. The dependent variable was measured using The Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire (PRAQ) (1997) developed in Australia by Ken Rigby, Ph.D. St. Bernard’s School was randomly assigned as the experimental group and participated in a six-week anti-bullying program while Jacques Fontaine School was assigned as the control group and therefore did not participate in the program. Following

the implementation of the 6-week program, students from each school were once again tested using the PRAQ. Data gathered from pretest-posttest measures for control and experimental groups was analysed to determine the impact of the anti-bullying program.

Limitations of the Study

One possible weakness of this study involved the use of the pretest-posttest control group design chosen for use in this study. The weakness with this type of design could have been a possible interaction between the pretest and the treatment group which may make the results of the study generalizable only to other pretested groups. Further, the results of this study may not be generalizable to the population as a whole.

Another possible limitation is The Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire (PRAQ), chosen as the instrument of choice for this study, may not have been sensitive enough to adequately measure changes in the prevalence of bullying behavior over a six-week period. Further, the six-week anti-bullying program may not have been of sufficient length to initiate significant changes in the prevalence of bullying. In addition, the anti-bullying program developed for use in this study may have been flawed.

Significance of the Study

Although violence in schools is a growing concern, there has not been a national outcry to investigate a government supported program to address bullying behavior in schools. Until such a time when there is a coordinated, nationally based effort, studies such as the one contained in this paper reflect a continuing effort to combat bullying with parents, students and school staff working together to identify solutions to the problem of bullying in schools.

This study will also contribute to the larger body of research on bullying behavior. As noted earlier, few studies have actually attempted to measure the impact of an anti-bullying program on the prevalence of bullying and none have actually used a control group for comparison. One crucial component of this program involves the development of a school-based anti-bullying policy. This policy will serve as a prototype for the development of what this researcher hopes will be a school board wide anti-bullying policy aimed at creating “safe schools” for the students under its direction.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The present review focuses on bullying as it occurs in a school setting. Olweus's (1992) widely accepted definition of bullying was used to guide this review. Bullying in the context of racial and sexual harassment was not included. As well, the researcher excluded articles dealing with the bullying of a specific population, such as special needs children. Bullying was examined as a specific problem in itself, not as a factor of broader conduct disorders.

Definition of Bullying

Siann, Callaghan, Lockhart & Rawson (1993) in their research on teacher's views of bullying, identify some of the difficulties in defining bullying. First of all, there is a lack of consensus in the literature as to whether the focus is largely on physical bullying, or whether it includes such behaviors as ostracism and teasing. There is also disagreement as to whether the focus is on group bullying, something (Pikas, 1975) describes as "mobbing", or lone bullies. As well, there are inconsistencies in the research in considering the duration of the episodes in defining bullying.

Perhaps the most widely accepted definition of bullying comes from Olweus (1992) who defines it as follows:

A person is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons. A negative action takes place when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another. Negative actions can be carried out by physical

contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or obscene gestures or refusing to comply with another person's wishes. It must be stressed that the terms bullying and victimization do not apply when two persons of approximately the same strength (physical or psychological) are fighting or quarrelling. (p. 280)

Kinds of Bullies

Lajoie et al., (1997) have identified what they feel are four kinds of bullies.

1. **Physical Bullies:** this type of bullying includes hitting or kicking the victim, or, taking or damaging the victim's property. This is the least sophisticated type of bullying because it is so easy to identify. Physical bullies are soon known to the entire population in the school.
2. **Verbal Bullies:** this type of bullying includes name-calling, insulting, making racist comments and constant teasing. This type of bullying is the easiest to inflict on other children. It is quick and to the point. It can occur in the least amount of time available, and its effects can be more devastating in some ways than physical bullying because there are no physical scars.
3. **Relational Bullies:** relational or relationship bullies try to convince their peers to exclude or reject a certain person or people, and cut the victim off from their social connections. This type of bullying is linked to verbal bullying and usually occurs when children (most often girls) spread nasty rumours about others or exclude an ex-friend from the peer group. The most devastating effect with this type of bullying is rejection by the peer group at a time when children most need their social connections.

4. **Reactive Victims:** reactive victims straddle a fence of being a bully and/or victim. They are often the most difficult to identify because at first glance they seem to be targets for other bullies. However, reactive victims often taunt bullies, and bully other people themselves. (p. 16-17)

Prevalence of Bullying as a Function of Age and Gender

Estimates of the number of students bullied by others range from as low as 5 percent of the student population (Besag, 1989), to as high as 75 percent (Hoover, Oliver & Hazler, 1992). A number of researchers have noted the incidence of bullying varies from one country to another, and therefore data from one country cannot be generalized. (Olweus, 1978; Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995).

Olweus (1987), in his study of Norwegian students, found 9 percent of eight to sixteen year olds reported being bullied. Stephenson & Smith (1989), in a U.K. study, found 23 percent of students could be classified as either bullies or victims. In Zimbabwe, Zindi (1994) reported 16 percent of students were bullied now and then, and 18 percent were bullied weekly or more often. O'Moore & Hillery (1989) surveyed seven to thirteen year olds in Dublin and found 10 percent were involved in serious bullying, either as victims or bullies. Some estimates of the prevalence of bullying in the United States include:

- 14% experiencing severe bullying to 75% experiencing some bullying during their school years (Hoover, Oliver & Hazler, 1992),
- 18.6% of secondary students experiencing physical abuse to 43.3% reporting verbal abuse (Branwhite, 1994),

- 15% to 20% of U.S. students experiencing bullying of some kind (Batche & Knoff, 1994).

In Canadian-based surveys of children in grades 1 to 8, Pepler and Craig (1997) report that 6 percent of children admitted bullying others “more than once or twice” in the past six weeks and 15 percent of children reported they had been victimized at the same rate. These results are comparable to those obtained by other Canadian researchers such as Bentley and Li (1995). In a Toronto-based study, Charach, Pepler & Ziegler (1995) estimate that 8 percent of students are bullied regularly, while 49 percent are bullied at least once or twice a term.

Olweus (1991) suggests bullying takes on more serious forms and occurs more frequently than it did 10 to 15 years ago in Norway. In the United States, Johnston, O’Malley and Bachman (1993) report an increase, from 19 percent in 1980 to 25 percent in 1992, in the percentage of 12th graders threatened without a weapon.

Given these discrepancies among studies, it is difficult to accurately estimate the actual prevalence of bullying among students. One possible reason for such discrepancies says Schuster (1996) relates to the actual definition of bullying the researcher is utilizing in their study. She states that while the studies

demonstrate, on the one hand, that almost everyone- in Hoover et al., (1993) close to 90%- is familiar with the experience of being terrorized by others. They also demonstrate, however, that bullying in the sense of the strict definition affects only a small number of people. Taking the parameters of duration and frequency into account, at any given point in time, a percentage of 4.3% were identified as victims

by means of self-reports (Slee, 1993), and 3% as victims of severe bullying via teacher assessment (Olweus, 1978) (p. 299).

Batsche & Knoff (1994) conclude that, “the general trend is for boys both to bully and be bullied more than girls” (p. 168). Numerous studies examined in this review support the above premise (Slee, 1993; Charach et al., 1995; Rigby and Slee, 1995; Slee & Rigby, 1993; Lowenstein, 1994; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Branwhite, 1994; Boulton and Underwood, 1992). Lowenstein (1994) points out that while girls are more likely to use verbal or psychological bullying, boys tend to use physical bullying.

While some researchers, says Schuster (1996), including (Olweus, 1991; Batche & Knoff, 1994; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Whitney & Smith, 1993) have revealed a decrease in bullying with increasing age, others, including (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazel, 1992; Hoover, Oliver, & Thompson 1993; Perry, Kushel, & Perry, 1988; Slee 1993; Moran , Smith, Thompson, & Whitney, 1993; Yates & Smith, 1989) have revealed no age effects. Still other researchers like Slee and Rigby (1993) found the victimization of children increased with age. Finally, O’Moore and Hillary (1989) found a curvilinear relationship, with the lowest rate in grade 5. It would appear says Schuster (1996) given such a pattern of results within the context of bullying, “...there is no clear evidence on age effects” (p. 299).

Why Children Bully

While there is an abundance of literature describing the characteristics of a typical bully, there seems to be little research which aims to determine why children bully others.

Boulton and Underwood (1992) in their study using a self-report bullying scale, determined these reasons as to why some children bully:

- a large majority of self-reported bullies responded they pick on others because they are provoked. They, therefore, view their behaviour as justified.
- about 5 percent of the bullies said they did so because they are “tough”, “hard”, or “strong.”
- lack of empathy for the victim.

Oliver, Hoover & Hazler (1994) surveyed students regarding factors which motivate and sustain bullying. From the general student population, they discovered the majority surveyed believed bullied students are at least partly to blame for their own victimization. Sixty-one percent believed bullying made victims tougher, and therefore is of benefit to the victim. Most students tended to agree teasing was done in fun. Girls, but not boys, tended to agree bullies held a higher social status than did victims.

Bully Characteristics

The word “bully” for many of us, brings to mind images of an over-sized boy who uses his physical strength to dominate and compensate for what he lacks intellectually. Slee & Rigby (1993) found that typically, bullies have average self-esteem and, unlike their victims, enjoy some status in their peer group. Similarly, Rigby & Cox (1996) found that while female bullies often have low self-esteem, the same cannot be said of male bullies.

Bullies have been characterized as impulsive, with a strong need to dominate others, and having little or no empathy for their victims (Olweus, 1991). The majority of bullies

claim to be provoked by the victim to attack, and see themselves as being tough and strong (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). Lowenstein (1995) also found that bullies are “...extremely perceptive in their capacity to identify children who were likely to be the victims of bullying and to successfully bully these” (p.30).

Another interesting finding in the literature on bullying involves the role family relations plays in why some children become bullies. Bowers, Smith & Binney (1994) found bullies are more likely than their peers to have a father absent from the home, to lack cohesion in their family, and to have family relationships that are often lacking in warmth.

In their review of the literature on family issues as they relate to bullies and victims, Oliver et al., (1994) identified the following characteristics of the families of bullies:

- they have a cold emotional environment,
- there are few family rules and little structure,
- the family suffers from social isolation and disengagement from their communities,
- there exists parental conflict and disharmony,
- there are ineffective child management techniques used by parents,
- there is often excessive physical punishment and angry emotional outbursts.

Victim Characteristics

Just as we have stereotypes of the bully, for most of us the image of a bullying victim is one of a physically weak individual who in some way, such as physical appearance or ability, deviates from the social norm. Typically, victims have been found to suffer from low self esteem, to lack social skills, to be anxious, and to be less popular than their peers