



INTRODUCTION

Bullying is increasingly being recognized as an important problem facing our schools, with reports that 8.4% to 34% of students in the US experience bullying one or more times per week (Nansel et al., 2001; Stockdale, Hangadumbo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002).

The bullying continuum reflects the range of roles that individuals may experience in the bullying dynamic, including bullies, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders.

Bystanders play a crucial role in the bully/victim cycle (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996) and in understanding the bullying dynamic (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Twenlow, Sacco, & Williams, 1996).

Additionally, bystanders are key to school climate. When bystanders take a stand against bullying they create an environment that is safer and more conducive to learning (Trenlow, Peaceful Schools Project study with Topeka schools, 2002).

School climate can be defined as the total environmental quality within a school and is multi-dimensional: physical, social, culture, milieu (Anderson, 1982).

Researchers have limited knowledge about the effects of the school setting on bullying, particularly how school climate affects victims and bullies (Ma, 2001) as well as the social and environmental factors that facilitate or inhibit bullying (Nansel et al., 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine student and teacher perceptions of school climate and attitudes towards bullying among middle-school youth. The role of the bystander and implications that these students might have for future bullying prevention and intervention programs will also be discussed.

PARTICIPANTS

Data were collected in the Spring of 2004 from 436 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and 127 teachers/staff at three Midwestern middle schools.

School A

Students:

- 118 (53 male and 65 female) students from School A participated in the study.
- Participants consisted of 44 sixth-graders, 48 seventh-graders, and 26 eighth-graders.
- Ages ranged from 11-13 years old ($M = 11.73$, $SD = .62$) for the sixth-grade participants; 12-14 years old ($M = 12.79$, $SD = .50$) for the seventh-grade participants; 13-15 years old ($M = 13.73$, $SD = .53$) for the eighth-grade participants.
- Racial distribution: 53.4% Caucasian, 12.7% African-American, 8.5% Mixed Minority, 7.6% Latino(a), 6.8% Asian, 5.1% Eastern European, 3.4% Middle Eastern, 0.8% Native American, and 1.7% other.

Teachers:

- 47 (16 male and 31 female) teachers and staff from School A participated in the study.
- Racial distribution: 87.2% Caucasian, 4.3% Latino(a), 2.1% African-American, 2.1% Mixed Minority, 2.1% other, and 2.1% did not report.

School B

Students:

- 150 (62 male and 88 female) students from School B participated in the study.
- Participants consisted of 37 sixth-graders, 61 seventh-graders, and 52 eighth-graders.
- Ages ranged from 11-13 years old ($M = 11.84$, $SD = .59$) for the sixth-grade participants; 11-14 years old ($M = 12.82$, $SD = .47$) for the seventh-grade participants; 13-15 years old ($M = 13.69$, $SD = .54$) for the eighth-grade participants.
- Racial distribution: 76.7% Caucasian, 7.3% Mixed Minority, 4.0% African-American, 4.0% Latino(a), 3.3% Asian, 1.3% Native American, 1.3% Middle Eastern, 1.3% Eastern European, and 0.7% other.

Teachers:

- 29 (3 male and 26 female) teachers and staff from School B participated in the study.
- Racial distribution: 87.2% Caucasian, 4.3% Latino(a), 2.1% African-American, 2.1% Mixed Minority, 2.1% other, and 2.1% did not report.

School C

Students:

- 168 (72 male and 96 female) students from School C participated in the study.
- Participants consisted of 60 sixth-graders, 65 seventh-graders, and 43 eighth-graders.
- Ages ranged from 11-12 years old ($M = 11.60$, $SD = .50$) for the sixth-grade participants; 12-14 years old ($M = 12.65$, $SD = .51$) for the seventh-grade participants; 13-14 years old ($M = 13.82$, $SD = .39$) for the eighth-grade participants.
- Racial distribution: 82.1% Caucasian, 6.0% Mixed Minority, 3.6% African-American, 3.0% Asian, 1.8% Eastern European, 0.6% Latino(a), and 3.0% other.

Teachers:

- 51 (13 male and 38 female) teachers and staff from School C participated in the study.
- Racial distribution: 93.1% Caucasian and 6.9% Mixed Minority.

Participants were grouped according to status (i.e., bully, bully-victim, victim, bystander or not involved) based on their responses on the Bully Survey (Swearer, 2001). Bully/victim status distribution for the 436 students who participated was: 12% bullies ($n = 50$), 28% victims ($n = 124$), 29% bully-victims ($n = 127$), 23% bystanders ($n = 100$), and 8% not involved ($n = 35$). See Figure 1. Bully/victim status distribution by school was:

School A - 12% bullies ($n = 14$), 32% victims ($n = 38$), 27% bully-victims ($n = 32$), 21% bystanders ($n = 25$), and 8% not involved (i.e., don't endorse bullying or victimization; $n = 9$). See Figure 2.

School B - 13% bullies ($n = 19$), 29% victims ($n = 44$), 34% bully-victims ($n = 51$), 19% bystanders ($n = 28$), and 5% not involved ($n = 8$). See Figure 2.

School C - 10% bullies ($n = 17$), 25% victims ($n = 42$), 26% bully-victims ($n = 44$), 28% bystanders ($n = 47$), and 11% not involved ($n = 18$). See Figure 2.

INSTRUMENTATION

***The Bully Survey – Student Version (Swearer, 2001).** The Bully Survey is a three part, 31-question survey that queries students regarding their experiences with bullying, perceptions of bullying, and attitudes toward bullying. Bullying is defined in each section of the survey as: **“bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose and the person being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Usually, bullying happens over and over. Punching, shoving and other acts that hurt people physically; spreading bad rumors about people, keeping certain people out of a ‘group’, teasing people in a mean way, or getting certain people to ‘gang up’ on others.”** In Part A of the survey, students answer questions about when they were victims of bullying during the past year. If the participants report they have not been victims of bullying, they are instructed to skip Part A and begin Part B. Part B of the survey addresses questions about the participants' observations of bullying behavior among their peers during the past year (bystander role). If they report that they have not observed bullying behavior, the participants are instructed to skip Part B and resume at Part C. Part C of the survey requests information from the participants about when they have bullied other students. If the participants indicate that they have not bullied other students within the last year, they are instructed to skip Part C and complete the final section of the survey. The final section contains a 14-item scale that measures attitudes toward bullying. To replicate previous findings a factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction with varimax rotation was conducted to determine dimensionality. The pro-bullying attitudes accounted for 31.10% of the item variance. Only two items did not load on this factor, thus supporting a 12-item scale. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .70 for the 12 items.

***Thoughts About Your School (modified from Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990 & Moos, 1979).** This instrument is a 13-item scale measuring aspects of school climate hypothesized to be relevant to students' emotional and behavioral development. Students and teachers are asked to rate each item in terms of how they think it reflects their school in a four-point scale from 1 = “Totally False” to 4 = “Totally True.” Scores range from 13 to 52; higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of school climate. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .72 for the total score.

• Active parental consent and youth assents were obtained for each participant in the study.

• All participants were administered a series of instruments, including the Bully Survey – Student Version and Thoughts About Your School, during the Spring of 2004.

PROCEDURES

Figure 1.
Bully/Victim Status Across Schools

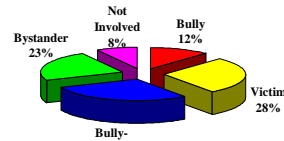
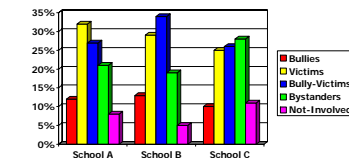


Figure 2.
Bully/Victim Status By School



RESULTS

Attitudes

- A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between position (student or teacher) and attitudes towards bullying.
- There was a significant difference between student and teacher attitudes towards bullying across the entire sample and across schools, with students reporting more pro-bullying attitudes.
- A one-way ANOVA was significant for all schools.
 - School A: $F(1, 163) = 14.819$, $p < .001$
 - School B: $F(1, 176) = 11.967$, $p < .001$
 - School C: $F(1, 215) = 11.413$, $p < .001$
- A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between bully/victim status and pro-bullying attitudes.
- The ANOVA was significant, $F(4, 429) = 20.632$, $p < .000$.
- Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey's HSD test were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means.
- Significant differences in pro-bullying attitudes were found between bullies and all other status groups (i.e., bully-victims, victims, bystanders, and not involved students).
- Victims were also significantly different from bully-victims and bystanders.

School Climate

- A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between position (student or teacher) and perception of school climate.
- The results were not consistent across schools.
- A one-way ANOVA was significant for schools B and C, but not for school A.
 - School A: $F(1, 162) = 1.766$, $p = .186$
 - School B: $F(1, 176) = 23.589$, $p < .001$
 - School C: $F(1, 213) = 23.933$, $p < .001$
- Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey's HSD test were conducted by school to evaluate pairwise differences among the means.
- At School B, a significant difference in perception of school climate was found between bully-victims and bystanders, with bystanders having a more positive perception.
- At School C, significant differences in perception of school climate were found between the bully-victim group and bystanders and not involved students. Bully-victims had a more negative perception of school climate.

Figure 3.
Mean Scores for Students and Teachers on Bully Attitudinal Scale

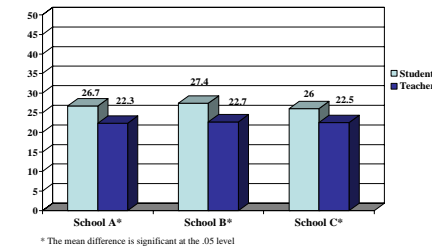
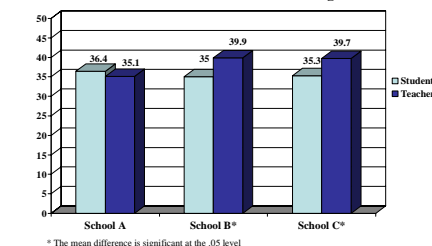


Figure 4.
Mean Scores for Students and Teachers on Thoughts About School



DISCUSSION

Attitudes

- Teachers were less supportive of bullying behavior compared to students across schools.
- Bullies were the most supportive of bullying behavior, followed by bully-victims, not involved students, bystanders, and victims.
- Bullies were significantly more supportive of bullying behavior compared to all other individuals.

School climate

- At School A there was overlap in the student and teacher perceptions of school climate.
 - Possible reasons: School A has participated in the Target Bullying study since 1999.
- At Schools B and C, students reported significantly lower perceptions (more negative) of their school climate compared to teachers.
- Across schools, students not involved in bullying had the most positive perception of school climate, while bully-victims consistently reported the most negative perception of school climate.
- At School B, bully-victims were significantly different from bystanders.
- At School C, bully-victims were significantly different from bystanders and students not involved in bullying.

Bystander Role

- Bystanders were less supportive of bullying behavior than bullies, bully-victims and not involved students.
- Bystanders consistently reported a more positive perception of school climate compared to students involved in bullying (i.e., bully-victims, victims, and bullies).

Global Summary

- Schools should take an active approach towards addressing bullying and peer victimization.
- It is important to define school climate and assess your school to determine the climate at that point in time. Perceptions will vary from person to person across the same situation and those perceptions are likely to be affected by current or past experiences within that environment.
- Educating students about bullying and modeling of pro-social behaviors are important components to include in prevention and intervention strategies.
- Bystanders should be included in prevention and intervention strategies. This group of students could serve as pro-social models and help in creating an environment that is not conducive to bullying.
- Student perceptions of school climate can be an indicator of the effectiveness of school response to bullying.

Future Research

- To effectively deal with bullying, researchers must further explore school characteristics that contribute to its cycle.
- Further research needs to be conducted on defining school climate specifically in relation to bullying.
- Future research needs to explore student responses to bullying (e.g., what do bystanders do or not do?).
- Research should continue to explore what strategies schools currently implement to address bullying.

Limitations

- Psychometric properties of the Thoughts About Your School are still being tested.
- Some potential differences among the bully/victim status groups might not have been salient due to the small sample size of the students not involved in bullying.
- Bully/victim status was determined through self-report only.

