

A STUDY TO IDENTIFY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING EXPERIENCES.

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify middle school students' perceptions of bullying within their school. There were 168 students in a Midwestern school district surveyed in the fall of 2004. The sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students were administered surveys in their homerooms and measures of central tendency were run to report statistical percentages relating to the problem of bullying within this middle school.

This study provided an overview of the problem, how to recognize a victim or a bully, the overall effects bullying has on the victim and the bully, and preventions and interventions in which parents and schools can implement. Students in this particular school were asked various questions relating to how often they see or are involved in bullying incidents, how they are affected, and how they deal with bullying. It was found

that bullying was an issue at this school that affected half of the student population in some way. Results about what bullying effects have on kids' school performance and how they respond to bullying is reported. Lastly, this study provided us with a discussion and conclusion. It provided recommendations of providing in-service training, establishing clear school rules, helping teachers set up individual plans to deal with bullying, and continuing research on this issue. These can be implemented not only within this school, but within other schools that are also dealing with the negative effects of bullying. Recommendations for future research were also provided.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In a recent study of 37 different shooting incidents within schools, the U.S. Secret Service learned that a majority of the shooters had suffered a severe amount of harassment and bullying, according to Lumsden (2002). Besides that horrifying statistic, Lumsden found that 30% of 15,000 students who were surveyed in one report bully others or are the target themselves. That is nearly one in every three children affected by bullying. Lumsden also noted in a study of fourth through eighth graders, 15% were extremely distressed by bullying and their academic performance was significantly altered because of mistreatment by their peers. Extremely bothersome statistics show approximately 282,000 students are physically attacked in middle or high schools monthly. Nearly 160,000 students stay home from school every day because they are afraid of being bullied (Lumsden, 2002). These are alarming figures of which parents and schools need to be aware.

Both victims and bullies alike suffer the effects of bullying. Victims suffer both physically and psychologically. Juvonen and Graham (2001) reported their symptoms often include anxiety, low self-esteem, sadness, loneliness, headaches, and stomachaches. Bullies may show symptoms of being unhappy, not keeping friends, and are likely to continue these behaviors into adulthood. It is best if adults are able to recognize the signs of bullying and be able to help all involved before the situation adversely affects the victim or the bully.

The following is a personal story written by Rose, a student who was bullied (Geocities, 2004, para.3).

Rose wrote:

After this new girl came to school, I was never left alone. I stood next to the school doors in the same place every day, and I have never felt so alone in all my life. I stood every day, watching everybody else playing and laughing, just waiting for when they would all come and stand around me to laugh at me and call me names. I wanted to die then, I thought of killing myself all the time just to get out of school, I'm not sure why I never just did it. Inside school, in the classroom, I had to sit on a table with the people who bullied me and I just sat and listened to them being cruel to me, they never stopped, it honestly was constant. They threw things at me, stole my things, tripped me up, but it only ever once got properly physical, I was grabbed, thrown around and my ankle was very nearly broken- people just stood and laughed. The worst thing though was being left out, having to watch everyone else playing. I did try to join in but I was always rejected so I think I just gave up in the end. Sometimes if someone was alone they would ask me to play with them, but I was always the last resort, and often the only reason someone asked me was so they could take me to their group and leave me out and call me names. This happened for years and I'd rather die than ever have to go through all that again, it was a living hell.

Rosie went on to say how awful she felt inside and that if anyone else was going through this situation, that she wanted them to talk to her so she could help.

Another person wrote to tell of her experience (Geocities, 2004). Her school life started out as she would sit in a corner of school and cry while people called her names. Kids would push her and throw basketballs at her head. At home, she was always being yelled at and felt there was no one she could turn to. She stated she would still rather be

at school than at home. She continued with her story once she reached middle school.

She wrote:

I carried on going to school, knowing that the day ahead was going to be full of pain. I saw the looks they gave me, the ones that weren't brave enough to shout out anything at me. My so called friends started saying that I was thick, stupid, worthless, ugly, fat... and this was exactly how I felt. They told me it so often that I started believing it. I got depressed and felt so trapped. And there was no way out, nothing I could do to make things better. I was being bullied everywhere I went. I started self-harming myself, then I got a few close friends. So, I stopped self-harming. Then my best friend tried to kill herself again. I started getting depressed again. My parents were still telling me that they hated me. I'm now only 15, in year 11 of school, everything exactly the same. (para. 5)

These are two extreme accounts, but these do happen every day. There are many, many stories of students being teased, taunted, having lunch money stolen, and feeling horrible about themselves.

This is such an important issue of which parents and teachers should be aware and ready to help. It all starts with a school taking a look at its atmosphere and surveying students as to the amount of bullying that is taking place. After that, there are many preventions and interventions which can be put into place to stop this cycle of bullying before it negatively affects more students, whereby possibly leading to these horrific school shootings.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying clearly has a devastating effect on young people, including middle school students. Yet, not enough information exists regarding the effects on middle school students regarding the problem.

The purpose of this study was to identify middle school students' perceptions of bullying within their school. Data were collected during the fall of 2004 by handing out surveys in homerooms to designated 6th, 7th, and 8th graders in a central Wisconsin middle school.

There were three research questions this study addressed. These were:

1. What is the extent of bullying at the school?
2. What impact does bullying have on individual students?
3. How do students respond to bullying at school?

Definition of Terms

Bullying. Bullying is the repeated exposure over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Juvonen & Graham, 2001).

Harassment. Harassment is disturbing persistently, tormenting, or pestering (Costello, R., et al., 1992).

Assumptions

It was assumed that the students did respond honestly and accurately to the items in the survey. The instrument was not validated, but it was assumed by its face validity that it measured what it was intended to measure. It was also assumed that all students who took this survey had the reading ability to understand what each question asked of them.

Limitations

A limitation that may have affected the results of this study was that some students may not have responded honestly to the survey. One reason for this is that they may have tried to guess how the researcher would like the survey answered. Another reason is they could have been afraid of responding truthfully if incidents of bullying had occurred and they had not previously reported them. The students may have been fearful of their parents', teachers', counselors', or administrators' reactions to the answers because they may not have fully understood the definition of confidentiality involved in the study. Other limitations included the unknown validity and reliability of the instrument, the lack of a representative population, and a possible bias on behalf of the population. The participants may have been biased toward those who have a strong interest or history with bullying, since they were not randomly chosen.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by explaining the degree to which students deal with bullying at school. It continues with acknowledging characteristics of victims and how bullying affects their lives. Next, there is discussion of the bully's characteristics and some possible causes of why a person bullies. Bullying also affects the bully her/himself and those effects are listed as well. After that, many students' perceptions of bullying are examined. The chapter concludes with preventative measures a school and parents can take before bullying becomes a problem and some possible interventions to use once bullying is identified.

Extent of the Problem

"According to some estimates, 160,000 children skip school each day because of intimidation by their peers. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that 77% of middle and high school students in small mid-western towns have been bullied" (Coy, 2001, p. 1). There are many different statistics representing the amount of bullying that takes place in the United States and other parts of the world, all of which are alarming. Given the recent public recognition of the severity of this problem, schools have responded with zero-tolerance policies to combat incidences of school crimes and violence.

Bullying has been identified by researchers using many different definitions. It can include anything from ignoring, exclusion from a group, name-calling, writing inappropriate things about a person, stealing of possessions, hitting, teasing, sexual harassment, to acting violently. Depending on a surveyor's definition, we yield different results; yet any statistics that state that young children in our schools today are bullied

shows that we need to address the issue with seriousness rather than seeing it as a “rite of passage.”

Olweus (2003) was the first researcher to conduct major studies on bullying behaviors back in the 1970's and 1980's in Norway and Sweden. It is only in recent times that more research has been done in our country. Olweus reported that 15% of students are either bullied on a regular basis or initiate the bullying. He felt that direct bullying seemed to increase during the elementary years, peak during the middle years, and decrease once students moved onto high school. Yet Olweus stated (cited in Coy, 2001) that verbal abuse remained constant throughout the years.

Since Olweus' time of research, recent studies indicate that bullying has become more frequent and harsher than in past decades. Lumsden (2002) reported that 30% of students say they have bullied others, have been bullied, or both. This was the first nationally representative survey providing results for bullying among students in the United States. Since this is a heightened issue needing immediate attention due to recent school violence, it is suspected that more studies will be conducted within the United States in the coming years.

Characteristics of Victims

Students who are targeted by bullies are typically anxious, insecure, cautious, and suffer from low self-esteem, rarely defending themselves when confronted by a bully. These students may lack social skills and friends and are often socially isolated (Banks, 1997). According to experts in the field (Sudermann, Jaffe, & Shieck, 1996), children who become bullied tend to be quiet and shy in temperament. They tend not to be assertive in their responses or retaliate, and they are often not confident in their physical abilities and strength. Most victims do not provoke the situation, but bullies may be

drawn to what they see as the victim's irritating social behaviors. Ross (2003) listed many characteristics of victims including the following: they believe they can't control their environment, are less popular, have underlying fears, blame themselves for their own problems, are younger than their peers, feel inadequate, and have family members who are over-involved in their decisions and activities.

According to Banks (1997), research has shown that the victims tend to be physically weaker and smaller than their peers. They are often unable to defend or stand up for themselves. Surprisingly, physical characteristics like weight, dress, and wearing glasses are not significant factors associated with victimization.

Yet, according to Freedman (2002), kids are teased and picked on for anything and everything. She may be too tall or too small. He may be too smart or not smart enough. The top ten topics on which kids were teased may range in any order, but include: appearance, abilities (physical and intellectual), identity (such as gender, race, and religion), behavior, family circumstances, possessions, opinions, name, feelings and friends. Interestingly, Ross (2003) discussed how children have little control over their environment. They do not choose how they look, what family they were born into, or what school they want to attend. If their school has many bullies, they do not get to choose to go to another school. There are many restrictions placed on children that increases their vulnerability to be victimized. Ross also stated a great point about the tolerance of bullying in regards to children and our criminal justice system. If a victim is a child and assaults or theft of items occurs, then these criminal behaviors are tolerated. Yet, if the victim were an adult, these adult victims would be able to prosecute and not have to tolerate these behaviors. So, these children who are lacking confidence, are small

in stature, or have poor coordination are very vulnerable to dangerous situations knowing there is little repercussions for the bully.

DeHaan (1997) provided some symptoms parents may want to look for in their child when assessing if this is possibly a bullying situation. She stated the child may act moody, withdrawn, or become depressed. The victim may lose interest in schoolwork, lose his appetite, find it difficult to get to sleep, or see a drop in grades. The victim may also arrive home with torn clothes, ask for extra money or refuse to even go to school. All of these signs need to be addressed if this is indeed a case of bullying before the situation leads to devastating effects for the victim.

Effects on Victims

Bullying can prove to have a detrimental impact on the students who are victims, said Lumsden (2002). One, they may have difficulty concentrating in school. Second, rates of absenteeism and dropping out of school are higher amongst these students compared to non-bullied kids. Another impact is youth may show higher levels of insecurity, depression, and loneliness. They oftentimes are unhappy and display a low self-esteem. Also, these students typically feel anxious, and this anxiety may turn into physical or emotional ailments. Emotionally, these students “have expressed thoughts of revenge, humiliation, helplessness, hopelessness, and self- pity” (Hazler, as cited in Smith, 2002, p. 20).

Victims may have a varying degree of problems. According to Juvonen and Graham (2001), over time they may have difficulty adjusting to problems, withdraw socially, and lose friends they may have had, in addition to the other problems listed above. The bullying may also lead to health problems like anxiety, social dysfunction,

depression, and then problems may also be manifested in symptoms of having headaches and stomachaches.

According to Sudermann, Jaffe, and Schieck (1996), victims are typically unhappy children. After a while they tend to avoid school or social interactions. Some victims become so distressed that they commit or attempt to commit suicide. Victims later on may become so angry that they retaliate with violent behaviors like frequent fighting or carrying and using a weapon against the bully.

Characteristics and Causes of Bullies

Olweus (as cited in Ross, 2003) stated that there are three types of bullies: the aggressive bully, the passive bully, and the bully victim. The aggressive bully is characterized by being impulsive, hot-tempered, confident, fearless, and belligerent. These children are overall unhappy and oftentimes characterized by once being popular in school when they were younger. The passive bully is one who is not as likeable as the aggressive bully and has a low self-esteem. The passive bully may come from a home that is not a happy situation. These kids may have temper outbursts that lead to trouble with their peers. They rarely provoke others, but once bullying is under way, they enter the scene. The passive bullies seem to align themselves with the aggressive bully. Next, the bully victims make up a very small group. They are often physically weaker than those who bully them, but stronger than their own victims. They provoke victims who are smaller than they are and who are easily angered as well.

Bullying tends to take place when the bully is stronger, more aggressive, bolder and more confident than the victim. It is a myth, according to Sudermann, Jaffe, and Schieck (1996), that bullies are insecure underneath it all. Research has shown that a bully's self-esteem is average or above. It does appear also that bullies come from homes

where aggressive strategies are used to deal with conflict. Oftentimes a bully child may have had a lack of attention growing up, or poor supervision at home. DeHaan (1997) also backed up this evidence stating that bullies come from families showing little warmth or affection and have a difficult time with sharing their feelings. Parents of these children have been known to use inconsistent methods of disciplining their children and don't monitor where their children go throughout the day. Aggressive behaviors may have been role modeled at home by parents.

Yet, it is also mentioned that it is not just the home life that determines a bully. It was stated that a child's temperament is the best indication for determining a bully. Children who are active, impulsive and have physical strength may be more inclined to develop into bullies. These students appear to have a need to feel powerful and in control (Banks, 1997). Banks stated that bullies find satisfaction from inflicting injury on others and have little empathy for their victims. DeHaan (1997) also stated that bullies typically are not performing well in school.

Geffner, Loring, and Young (2001) stated that the typical bully is characterized by having a positive attitude toward violence, having a need to dominate others, and having little empathy. Bullies are average or a little below average in popularity, and are usually surrounded by a small group of peers. When asking bullies why they bully, the authors received the responses that the bullies were provoked by the victim, they didn't like the victim, or they were feeling upset or angry and wanted to take out those aggressions on someone or something. Bullies also commented that when they were bullying someone, it made them feel good.

Effects on Bullies

Although it seems as though bullies gain something from their actions, the bully may also feel the negative outcomes and both short and long-term effects for his/her actions against another child. According to DeHaan (1997), on the short-term, even though bullies may be viewed positively by their peers, they may have difficulty maintaining close friendships. They also are typically not doing well in school and are not as well-liked by their teachers. There are also long-term effects for the bully. The aggression displayed often leads to more serious acts of delinquency and criminal activity later in the bully's life. Bullies are more likely to use drugs and alcohol during their adolescent years. As adults, they tend to continue to be aggressive individuals. These problem behaviors, as well as other social and legal problems tend to persist into adulthood as well. Olweus (as cited in Smith, 2002) showed that former bullies had four times the chances for committing serious crimes than the average person. These bullies continued to be uncaring, became parents and raised children with those similar aggressive behaviors.

Students' Perceptions

"Many of us question the difference between a bully, an aggressive child and everyday teasing," stated Sarazen, (2002, p. 6).

Toddlers routinely grab toys from other children, bite and push when they are angry. Kindergarteners exclude others from their group. Preteens and adolescents can become masters at spreading malicious gossip, ganging up on young children and labeling vulnerable peers. Much of this behavior has its roots in normal childhood development. (p. 6)

As children are all exploring social issues, they need to be taught to channel their aggressive behaviors in positive ways. It is difficult to define bullying precisely due to the variances of normal child development and how kids treat each other. Some people view certain behaviors as normal and other people feel the behavior shouldn't be tolerated.

Teasing becomes one such issue that becomes difficult to classify as bullying. Some people feel that teasing is just a part of life and teasing would not be considered bullying behavior to them. Other students classify bullying as teasing that is hurtful, like taunting that takes place repeatedly over time. Various students internalize situations differently. Some students feel that teasing, being laughed at, or name-calling is not bullying. Yet, students respond differently to certain situations, and some have better coping skills than others do to alleviate the hurt feelings. Ross (2003) stated that the weakness in the definition of bullying is that it is seen through the eyes of adults, when really, it should be the child's view of a stressor that defines it as bullying. It should not matter whether or not it is a repeated occurrence, it should be classified according to how it makes the bully feel. Along this continuum, if a student is feeling hurt, we need to look at both the bully and the victim.

Students reported feeling demeaned and devalued when they were teased. As we know, a child's self-esteem develops and is dependent on feedback from others. Most students who hear negative comments about themselves over time must feel like they are not very worthwhile individuals. Students reported that although the most teasing takes place in elementary school, once students reached middle school, teasing took on the form of flirtation; and although the person teasing is doing it because he may like a girl, it could still be hurtful nonetheless.

Again, challenging the definition of bullying, students reported in a study done by MacLeod and Morris (cited in Ross, 2003) that bullying to them is not described as repeated or long-standing. Most children reported bullying as possibly being unintentional at times or also intentional at other times. They felt it could happen systematically or randomly. Most children defined bullying as single episodes which resulted in feelings of helplessness, fear and anxiety; not sustained occurrences.

According to children interviewed by Geffner, Loring, and Young (2001), children's definitions of bullying were not consistent. Some felt bullying included both verbal and physical aggression. Others felt it meant making threats or seeking revenge. Most of the children felt it was the same as teasing or picking on others. When teachers nominated student bullies for the study, the bullies from the study were quick to respond that their teasing should not be taken seriously and felt other kids should be able to handle some teasing. In another study done by Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (as cited in Banks, 1997), students felt the victim was partially responsible for bringing on the bullying. Many students said that bullying toughened a weak person and taught the victim appropriate behavior. Students felt victims could be classified as weak or nerdy. In these situations almost half of all students who responded to the survey said they would try to help the victim in a bullying situation, and 33% said they felt they should try to help, but typically do not.

According to Demaray and Malecki (2003), students they surveyed reported a number of findings. They felt boys were found to be victims more often. Younger students tended to be the victims more often also, while older students tended to be the bully. Students also felt that their peers did not punish bullies for their behaviors and that aggressive boys are perceived as popular due to the toughness they display.

In another study done by Juvonen and Graham (2001), researchers asked middle school kids why some students get picked on a lot. Fifty-two percent of their respondents said that kids get picked on for reasons that are controllable to the victim. Some examples given were showing off, tattling, or bad-mouthing others, whereas most of the adults would probably not consider the victim to be responsible for these situations. Next highest though, 24% felt kids get picked on for things not within their control. Examples of uncontrollable situations were being weaker, smaller, or unable to defend her/himself.

Most kids in the survey given by Geffner, Loring, and Young (2001) also mentioned that bullying takes place most often at school and in locations out of sight and hearing distance of the teacher. Bullying was witnessed to take place in hallways, the cafeteria, locker rooms, bathrooms, during recess, in class, during passing times, and on the bus. Students who had reported in this survey that they were bullied said that many times they did not report the incidents. There was fear of retaliation. Or, many students claimed to have waited a long time before reporting an incident. So, there are many cases of bullying happening, adults are not witnessing the incidents, students are not telling, instead letting their anxiety grow without anyone being able to stop the bully. In these cases, as professionals, we need to be aware of these situations and how we can help kids.

Prevention and Intervention

Many steps can be taken within a school to help prevent bullying from happening and to help students who are involved in these incidences. According to Ross (2003), steps can be taken first starting with the family in promoting healthy behaviors and teaching techniques of how to deal with situations in which students are being harassed or picked on. Educators can instill in students the importance of telling an adult when a situation occurs so that someone can intervene before it becomes progressively worse. If

a student was in a situation where he/she felt bullied, parents can be taught appropriate steps to take in helping their child work through confrontations and how to approach an adult. The school can help teach parents how to deal with these situations.

Next, within the classroom, teachers can have discussions with students about bullying, noted Sudermann, Jaffe, and Schieck (1996). This may include developing class rules, role playing, and discussing ways to help each other. This is also a great opportunity for counselors to teach conflict resolution skills and address inappropriate behaviors. Students can be taught how to respond in situations where they are being bullied or where they witness someone doing something inappropriate to another student. Children should also be encouraged to report any incidents seen within the school to the counselor or principal as part of this process. We want children to feel like they are in a supportive and inclusive atmosphere when they are at school. This is where school policies can come into play.

Schools can address this issue on a bigger level. Much of the bullying happens in unstructured areas or out of hearing range of the teachers. It is very important to have staff visible as much as possible, especially in the hallways, lunchrooms, bathrooms and on the playground. Kids also need to see staff providing effective consequences to bullies to know that it is not tolerated within a school and that these situations will not be overlooked. It helps if all adults take this seriously and role-model that serious tone for the students.

It is also important for schools to have an accurate assessment of the problem within their individual school to address many issues. From there, a school can first develop in-service training for the staff and discuss the importance of visibility. Next, the code of conduct for an individual school can be examined to make sure everyone is

defining appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in the same way and knows how to follow through with effective consequences. After that the school as a whole can discuss its policy on competitiveness. It's better if competitiveness is not emphasized too much. Next, taking even more drastic measures if needed, some schools have even gone as far as measuring safety by installing video surveillance cameras to monitor what happens outside the realm of teacher visibility. Lastly and most importantly, the curriculum can also be discussed to include promoting and teaching communication and assertiveness skills.

This prevention or intervention of using curriculum could be to implement a bully-proofing program within the school. With this program, students can be taught effective skills of working and playing with one another. Schildt (2002) felt that it is always better to start at a young age. He implemented a bully-proofing program and at the middle school level, students were not too excited about the topic; thus he learned the importance of starting it in elementary school. His results of the implementation were found to be inconclusive. Yet, according to Sudderman, Jaffe and Schieck (1996), research has shown the effectiveness of these programs to reduce problems within many schools.

One of the most widely known intervention programs using curriculum has been used by Daniel Olweus in Norway, according to Baron (1997). His program educates teachers and parents through a booklet focusing on creating a good school environment, setting limits to unacceptable behavior, applying sanctions against bullying, and having adults act as an authority figure. He places the main responsibility for dealing with bullies on the adults within the school and does not focus as much on the peer group's role.

Luckily, if a child is harassed or bullied, there are many interventions in place already. Ross (2003) mentioned that hotlines have been established for students and parents to call with questions and to seek help. Kids and families must be aware of these programs, however. Support groups and other groups provide assertiveness training for kids who want to learn to deal with these situations effectively. Teen courts are even in place to show that it is important to teens that these behaviors are not tolerated within a school or community. Many proactive alternatives are ready for our use. If we are all on the same page and truly want to help eliminate bullying, there is much we can do to make this a safer, happier world in which our children can live.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the subjects used in this study and how they were selected for participation. Also to be discussed is the instrument designed, procedures for data collection, and how the data were analyzed. Limitations to the study will also be mentioned.

Description of Subjects and Selection

The subjects who participated in this study were 168 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from a middle school in a Wisconsin school district. The researcher selected three homerooms from each grade level to participate. The participants consisted of both male and female students.

Permission was received from district and school administration to ask for students' participation. The researcher explained to the school's counselors and administration that the results of this study should be used to identify any concerns of bullying within the school.

Instrumentation

The survey used was specifically designed for this study (Appendix A). The questions were chosen to find out the prevalence of bullying in this middle school. Topics were concerned with how many students were bullied, in what ways, how often, and where the incidences occurred. The survey also addressed how bullying affected the victim and what coping strategies were used to deal with each incident. Questions were also asked pertaining to whether or not the subject had witnessed bullying taking place at this school and if he/she had stepped into the situation to help. The participants were also asked if they participated in being the bully and in what ways. This survey was created using important elements from the researcher's literature. This survey has face validity

and appears to measure what is intended. This survey lacks reliability as it has not been tested over time or different situations.

Data Collection

Students from three sixth grade, three seventh grade and three eighth grade homerooms in a mid-western middle school were invited to participate in this study. A parental consent form and a brief description of the study were sent home to parents and asked to be brought back by Monday, November 8 (See Appendix A). The cover letter informed the parents that the child's participation was voluntary and would be kept confidential.

The students who returned their permission slips and also gave their own consent to participate, took the survey in their ten-minute morning homeroom class the weeks of November 8th and November 15th after announcements were finished. As the researcher addressed each class, the students were read the intent of the survey, informed of its importance, read a definition of bullying, and informed it was voluntary and confidential. Students were reminded not to write their names on the survey and were told if they had questions or needed any parts read to them, that was an option. They were asked to respond honestly and were given time to fill out the survey. The completed surveys were collected and placed in a manila envelope by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted to analyze the results of the questions addressed by the researcher. Descriptive statistics were used to find percentages for each response question. Results were then reported as they pertained to each of the three research questions.

Limitations

A few methodological limitations were apparent. Only one school was chosen, so the results should not be used to generalize to other populations. Not every child chose to fill out the survey. It was decided to have students fill out the survey in class despite the possibility of barriers like low reading levels or embarrassment of answering honestly in that setting. This procedure for data collection was chosen in order that it would be quickest and easiest for students. Lastly, no measures of validity and reliability have been run on this survey because it was specifically designed for this thesis.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of a survey of middle school students' perceptions of bullying in a mid-western school district. The demographic information of the subjects who participated in this study will be presented first. Next, an item analysis will be explained according to data gathered from each item on the instrument. The chapter will conclude with the research questions as they relate to the statistically significant results.

Demographic Information

The participants of this study included 168 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students from a middle school where the researcher taught. The sample in this study consisted of 33.9% (n=57) sixth graders, 23.8% (n=40) seventh graders, and 42.3% (n=71) eighth graders. The participants included 38.1% (n=64) males and 61.9% (n=104) females.

Item analysis

Survey item number one asked, "Have you been bullied at this school in the past?" The results indicated that 50% (n=84) of the participants were not bullied. The other 50% (n=84) noted they have been bullied. For those students who checked yes to the first part of the question, they then were able to check several areas of how they had been bullied. Of the total 168 students, 23.8% (n=40) were made fun of, 26.8% (n=45) were called a name, 18.5% (n=31) had a rumor spread about them, 13.1% (n=22) were physically pushed or kicked, 7.7% (n=13) were threatened, 11.3% (n=19) had something of theirs stolen or broken, 14.9% (n=25) were excluded from and group, and 3.6% (n=6) had been sexually harassed.

Survey item number two asked, “How often did this behavior take place?” Of those who responded to being bullied in the past at this school, their response to the frequency of being bullied is as follows: 14.9% (n=25) once or twice a year, 11.3% (n=19) monthly, 14.3% (n=24) weekly, and 8.3% (n=14) daily.

Question number three asked, “Due to these behaviors, how does this affect you?” Again, for those who had checked yes to the first question of being bullied, they were able to check several options to report how they were then affected. Of the 168 students, 7.1% (n=12) had a difficult time paying attention in class, 7.7% (n=13) reported having difficulty doing their homework, and 4.2% (n=7) of students stated they avoid going out for recess. The rest were recorded as .6% (n=1) reported avoiding coming to school and 3.6% (n=6) wrote that they weren’t affected in any of these areas. Twenty-eight individuals did not check anything. One point two percent (n=2) individuals reported being affected by both having difficulty paying attention and avoiding recess. One point two percent (n=2) marked three areas of having difficulty paying attention, having trouble with doing homework, and avoiding recess. Seven point one percent (n=12) were affected by both having a hard time paying attention and doing homework. Finally, .6% (n=1) marked having a hard time paying attention and avoiding coming to school.

Question four stated, “How do you cope with these situations?” Following are the results: 33.3% (n=56) ignore the person, 26.2% (n=44) tell them to stop, 13.7% (n=23) tell an adult, 4.2% (n=7) file a harassment form, 10.1% (n=17) fight back verbally, 5.4% (n=9) fight back physically, 14.9% (n=25) keep their hurt feelings to themselves, and 4.2% (n=7) have other coping behaviors. Participants listed the following coping mechanisms: telling the bully to back off, arguing with them, avoiding the bully, going with different people, asking the bully why they are doing that, crying and getting mad at

the bully, not letting on to the bully that the situation is bothering them, and just laughing along with the bully because they just want to be the bully's friend.

Question five asked, "Is another student currently bullying you?" Of the 84 participants who answered yes to being bullied at this school, 9.5% (n=16) said yes they are currently being bullied.. 39.9% (n=67) said no, they are not currently being bullied.

Question six asked, "Have you bullied another student at this school in the past?" Of the 168 participants, 19.0% (n=32) said yes, they have bullied another person and 81.0% (n=136) said no they haven't. Then when asked in which forms they have bullied someone, the results are as follows: 8.9% (n=15) have made fun of someone, 13.7% (n=23) have called someone a name, 4.2% (n=7) have spread a rumor about someone, 5.4% (n=9) have physically pushed or kicked someone, 2.4% (n=4) have threatened someone, .6% (n=1) have stolen or broken someone's belongings, 4.2% (n=7) have excluded someone from a group, and no one checked sexually harassing someone.

Number seven asked the participants, "If you have been bullied or are bullying someone, where does this take place?" The following were reported with having the option to check several possibilities: 27.4% (n=46) of the respondents reported occurrences in the hallway, 16.1% (n=27) noted bullying as taking place in the classroom, 6.5% (n=11) stated incidences occurred in the bathroom, 11.9% (n=20) reported the locker room as a location in which bullying took place, 10.1% (n=17) reported the cafeteria as an area, 20.8% (n=35) noted that incidences took place on the bus, and 24.4% (n=41) reported other locations such as at home on the phone, in parks, outside the school for recess, on the playground, in the group room, after school, and in the streets.

Question eight asked students, “Have you seen other students being bullied/ picked on at this school?” Respondents who said yes they have seen others bullied was reported as 76.2% (n=128) of those surveyed. The next questions asked them what they do about those situations.

Number nine asked the students, “If someone is being bullied, do you step in and say anything?” They responded as follows: 63.1% (n=106) said yes, they do, 30.4% (n=51) said no, they don’t say anything, and 3.6% (n=6) responded with saying sometimes. One point eight percent (n=3) said that it depends on the situation. For those who answered no, they do not step in, they were then asked why not. Most of the responses were fear-based or showed apathy. See Appendix C for those additional comments.

The final question on the survey, question ten stated, “Would you feel comfortable talking to an adult at this school about a problem with a bully?” Sixty-eight point five percent (n=115) students responded that yes, they would. Twenty-nine point two percent (n=49) said no they wouldn’t feel comfortable. One point eight percent (n=4) said it depends. For those who answered no, they were asked why not. The responses ranged from having difficulty sharing feelings, being fearful, not trusting adults, to showing apathy. See Appendix D for those additional comments.

Research Questions

The results will be explained in relation to the research questions addressed by this thesis. The study’s three research questions are answered with the summary of the results from the survey of the participants.

The first research question was, “What is the extent of bullying at the school?” Survey item numbers one, two, five, six, seven, and eight answered this question. The

results indicated that half the students reported being bullied, most frequently by being called a name or by being teased. Being threatened or sexually harassed were fairly uncommon. Most students who were bullied experienced this only occasionally, but for some (8.3%), bullying occurred daily. When asked whether another student was currently bullying them at this school, the overwhelming majority of the 84 students who had been bullied in the past reported that no they aren't currently being bullied. When asked if participants have bullied others themselves, an overwhelming number indicated that they have not. Yet, that left a smaller amount of individuals (19%) who did admit to bullying other students. When those thirty-two individuals were asked how they bullied someone, they noted the most common methods of calling someone a name or making fun of them. Spreading a rumor, excluding others from their group, or physically pushing or kicking others were methods used by very few individuals. The use of threats, stealing or breaking belongings and sexual harassment were almost non-existent. The majority of incidences took place in the hallway and other locations like outside of school or on the playground. The next most common places to see bullying at this school were on the bus or in the classroom. Bullying was not commonly witnessed in the locker room, cafeteria, or bathroom. Lastly the results showed the extent of bullying in this school, showing that an overwhelming amount of students have seen bullying happen at this school (76.2%).

The second research question was, "What impact does bullying have on individual students?" Survey question number three answered this question. Results showed that when asked how bullying affected those who have been victims, the majority checked none of these or didn't answer the question, so we can assume it didn't affect them in any of the ways listed. Others responded the two ways in which the bullying impacted them most was they had a hard time paying attention and doing homework and

many responded that they were affected by both having difficulty paying attention and doing homework. Only two individuals avoided coming to school as a result of being bullied.

The third research question asked, “How do students respond to bullying at school?” Survey questions four, nine and ten answer this research question. Of the 84 individuals who had been bullied in the past, the most common coping mechanisms used were to ignore the bully or tell the bully to stop. Keeping hurt feelings to themselves and telling an adult were also fairly common. Only a small amount of respondents chose to fight back physically or file a harassment form. When asked about witnessing bullying situations at school and how students respond, the majority said yes, they do say something. Almost a third of the students reported they did not say anything while others said sometimes and it depended on the situation. Lastly, when asked about responses to bullying and if students felt comfortable talking to an adult, the majority again said, yes, they do.

Overall, these results showed that half of the students at this school were experiencing situations of bullying with varying degrees of seriousness. There were also many students who have good strategies with which to deal with a bullying situation. The students who felt they were being bullied on a consistent basis were the individuals who appeared to be negatively affected the most.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will include a discussion of the research and the results of the study. Next, it will provide conclusions drawn from the results of the survey. In addition, recommendations for the school and for future research will be made in the area of middle school students' perceptions of bullying within their school.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of students' perceptions of bullying experiences in a mid-western middle school. This study addressed the extent of bullying, what impact bullying had on the students and how they responded to bullying situations. Data were collected and descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions of this study.

The significance of studying this topic of perceptions of bullying behaviors comes from research: "The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that 77% of middle and high school students in small mid-western towns have been bullied" (Coy, 2001, p.1). There are grave implications for students who have been bullied. Many effects start out with the victim having difficulty in school and lead up to withdrawing socially or even taking a gun to school with the intent of harming others. In a recent study of 37 different shooting incidents within schools, the U.S. Secret Service learned that a majority of the shooters had suffered a severe amount of harassment and bullying, according to Lumsden (2002).

Lumsden (2002) also found that 30% of students surveyed either bully others or are the victim. This study found that 50% of the respondents had been bullied at one point while they attended this school and those incidences ranged from a lot of minor

situations of name calling to very few serious situations of being threatened or sexually assaulted. Even more alarming is that Olweus (2003) reported 15% of students are either bullied on a regular basis or initiate the bullying. The results of this study show that to be true as 14.3% of students reported to being bullied on a weekly basis and 19% admitted to bullying another student.

One problem is that bullying is defined as occurring often over a long period of time. Many of the students in this school reported that the occurrences may have happened only one or two times or for a short amount of time. This can show varying differences when comparing the results of this study to other studies. MacLeod and Morris (cited in Ross, 2003) showed that students challenged the definition of bullying saying that they don't describe it as repeated or long-standing. Nonetheless, there are still harmful effects to any form of bullying.

Research shows that many of the effects of bullying for the victim are a loss of interest in schoolwork, feeling anxious, and showing signs of insecurity and depression. Lumsden (2002) reported that students may have difficulty concentrating in school and may show higher rates of absenteeism. It was found in this particular school that many of students who were bullied did have difficulty paying attention and doing homework. Only two people reported avoiding coming to school.

A survey given by Geffner, Loring, and Young (2001) mentioned that bullying takes place most often at school and in locations out of sight of the teacher. Frequent places mentioned were: hallways, cafeteria, locker room, bathroom, bus, and during recess. This researcher's study agreed in some areas, but results also showed that these instances are taking place right in the classroom where a teacher could be present. The four most common places for bullying to take place at this school were: hallway,

classroom, bus, and other locations, which were mostly noted as outside on the playground or at recess.

In a study performed by Oliver, Hoover, and Hazel (as cited in Banks, 1997), 50% of the students reported that they would try to help a victim in a bullying situation, and 33% said they felt they should try, but typically do not. This survey's results agree as 63.1% of students at this school do say something to interfere in the bullying situation, and 30.4% do not.

Conclusions

A determination from the findings of this study is that about half of the students were being bullied and it was affecting them in many areas including school performance. There were also many students, 19%, who admitted to bullying others and even more, 76.2%, who witnessed bullying at this school. There were also over a fourth of the students who felt they could not talk to an adult about the issue, which is alarming. Overall, the results of this survey were very similar to research in the field and past literature.

Recommendations

This study indicated that bullying is an issue in the school setting. It is relevant for this particular school to know the results of this study as well as future researchers to consider expanding on this current research. It is important that staff become aware of the prevalence of bullying, where it is happening, how it is affecting the students, and how they can help. It is important to provide in-service training to staff to bring awareness to the problem, discuss school rules and plans to deal with bullying, and then staff can create individual plans for dealing with the issue. It is also important to continue to provide research on this issue as it is a problem that is continuing to grow.

It is important within this school to have consistent school rules which also can be paired up with staff visibility. It would be important for many staff to be supervising in the halls and also outside where much of the bullying takes place. The classroom also cannot be left unsupervised as many of the incidents are occurring right in class. Ideally, a school would work out a plan to have staff not teaching classes at that certain time period monitoring the halls. It is also important for teachers to show consequences being given to students who exhibit bullying behavior and not just look the other way, so all students feel the issue is taken seriously at the school.

In classrooms, discussions about bullying can be held. It is important for students to know that a teacher or counselor is there for them and open for students to come and talk to them about issues on an individual basis. It is also important for safety that students do speak up and report incidents to adults and that they shouldn't be afraid to feel like a tattletale. They need to know that there will be consequences and shouldn't worry about retaliation on behalf of the bully if a safe environment within the school is provided.

A bullying prevention and intervention curriculum could be in place. It would be important to role-play situations with students and have serious discussions with them so they understand the zero-tolerance policy and can be taught how to respond to situations in which they could be bullied. These conflict resolution skills could be done as a whole class or in groups, always stressing the importance of school and class rules and treating others with kindness.

When doing future research, it is important to address a few more areas. It would be important to gather data from a different sample like a larger school in an urban setting or a different part of the country to compare the results. The definition should also be

stressed on the survey; it should be decided whether students are should be asked about bullying being frequent and over long periods of time. It would be important to have a survey item address the pervasiveness, or extreme nature of the bullying incidences. And, the study may want to include other areas of concentration like looking at how often bullying occurs during extra-curricular activities.

Finally, bullying has been shown to be prevalent in schools today and should be treated with seriousness. Bullying has so many negative effects that affect overall school performance and a child's self-esteem and happiness that it would be wise for individual schools to find out the prevalence of bullying within each school. Teachers need to be informed, students need to be taught how to handle specific situations, and together everyone can work to make an improvement by putting an end to bullying and encouraging positive interactions.

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Appendix A
Parent Letter and Permission Slip

Dear Parents of a middle school student,

My name is Mrs. Heidi Schmidt. I am a seventh grade teacher at [School Name] and I am also pursuing my graduate degree in Guidance and Counseling through UW-Stout. As a requirement for the program, I am writing a thesis on a topic of great interest to me, bullying. I feel that students today have to endure many trying social situations with peers. It is important to study the prevalence of bullying behaviors such as: teasing, ignoring, hitting, stealing, threatening, and spreading rumors. As you may know, these behaviors can no longer be looked at as a "rite of passage" for young adults and are taken very seriously within the schools. An important purpose for this study is to find out how often our students are dealing with these situations so that we can implement effective intervention strategies.

Students will be asked to voluntarily fill out a short survey that includes what kinds of bullying are taking place, how often, and where it happens. This study will be anonymous; in other words, students will not put their names on the survey. I hope that you will allow your child to partake in this quick survey in order to help school staff understand the prevalence of bullying and how to best meet the needs of our students.

If you have any questions, please contact Heidi Schmidt, the researcher, phone (715) 261-2000 or the research advisor Dr. Barbara Flom, phone (715) 232-1343. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

Thank you,

Heidi Schmidt
7th grade teacher

Please sign and return to your child's homeroom teacher by Monday, November 8.
Thank you!

_____ has my permission to fill out a survey on middle school students' perceptions of bullying within the school. I understand that my child's participation will be kept confidential, that surveys will be filled out anonymously, and that the results from this study will be shared with administration to better help the school.

Signature of Parent/ Guardian

Appendix B
[School Name] Bullying Survey

This is a voluntary survey to help adults in this school find out what bullying behaviors are taking place so we can better help kids. Please do not need to put your name on the survey so it can be kept anonymous. We would appreciate it if you answer honestly.

Bullying can mean different things to different people. For this survey, let's define bullying as someone doing something mean to you. Circle the answer that applies to you.

Grade: 6th 7th 8th

Gender: Male Female

1. Have you been bullied at this school in the past?

☐ NO (If no, skip to question #6.)

☐ Yes (*If yes, in what ways have you been bullied?*) (*Check all that apply.*)

☐ Made fun of

☐ Called a name

☐ A rumor was spread about me

☐ Physically (pushed, kicked)

☐ Threatened

☐ Something of mine was stolen or broken

☐ Excluded from a group

☐ Sexually harassed

2. How often did this behavior take place?

☐ once yearly ☐ monthly ☐ weekly ☐ daily

3. Due to these behaviors, how does this affect you? (*Check all that apply.*)

☐ I have a hard time paying attention in class

☐ I have a hard time doing homework

☐ I avoid going out for recess

☐ I avoid coming to school

4. How do you cope with these situations? (*Check all that apply.*)

☐ Ignore the person

☐ Tell them to stop

☐ Tell an adult

☐ File harassment form

☐ Fight back verbally

☐ Fight back physically

☐ Keep hurt feelings to myself

☐ Other coping behavior _____

(Next page)

5. Is another student currently bullying you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. Have you bullied another student at this school in the past?

☐ No (*If no, skip to question #7.*)

☐ Yes (*If yes, in what ways have you bullied someone?*) (*Check all that apply.*)

☐ Made fun of someone

☐ Called someone a name

☐ Spread a rumor

☐ Physically (pushed, kicked)

☐ Threatened someone

☐ Stole or broke someone's belonging

☐ Excluded someone from my group

☐ Sexually harassed someone

7. If you have been bullied or are bullying someone, where does this take place?

(*Check all that apply.*)

☐ Hallway

☐ Classroom

☐ Bathroom

☐ Locker room

☐ Cafeteria

☐ Bus

☐ Other location _____

8. Have you seen other students being bullied/ picked on at this school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

9. If someone is being bullied, do you step in and say something?

☐ Yes

☐ No (*If no, why not?*) _____

10. Would you feel comfortable talking to an adult at this school about a problem with a bully?

☐ Yes

☐ No (*If no, why not?*) _____

Appendix C

Number 9 survey question, "If someone is being bullied, do you step in and say something? If no, why not?"

Fear-based Responses:

I don't want the bully to hate me.
 If I don't know the person, I don't want to get hurt.
 The bully might do something to me.
 I'm scared they'll pick on me.
 I am afraid to interfere with someone being bullied because I could be bullied then, too.
 I don't want it to get worse.
 I'm afraid of them, even if I know I should step in.
 There are usually five or six of them bullying.
 That person might be stronger than me.
 I'm afraid to take action.
 Bigger people won't listen.
 I'm usually alone and the people are older.

Apathetic Responses:

I don't want to get into their problems.
 I don't really know them and it's nothing really big. They are just making fun of someone, and then they stop.
 I don't care.
 It's none of my business.
 I don't know the person.
 It's their own problem (the victim).
 It's not my problem.
 I don't want to get involved.
 I'll only step in when the person is getting physically hurt, otherwise it's none of my business.
 I don't like the person being bullied.
 They (the victims) need to stand up for themselves or they will be depending on other people for the rest of their lives.

Other Responses:

I am shy.
 Sometimes I tell an adult.
 I don't want to look dumb.
 I wouldn't know what to do.
 They are probably having a fight that seems fun to them.
 I'd rather go tell a teacher rather than get into something that I don't want to be in.
 I will tell a teacher.
 I want her (the victim) to try to stop it first.
 I have never been in this situation.

Appendix D

Number ten survey question asked, “Would you feel comfortable talking with an adult at this school about a problem with a bully? If no, why not?”

Difficulty Sharing Feelings Responses:

It's embarrassing.
 I don't like talking about my feelings.
 I don't share my feelings well.
 It's my business and they don't need to know about it.
 It's just me. I'm independent.
 It's uncomfortable.
 I don't like to share that kind of stuff.
 I don't know them (the adult).
 I don't like when people know how I feel.
 I'm not an open person.

Lack of Trust Responses:

It's easier to handle things myself.
 I don't feel I can trust them.
 I don't like talking to adults.
 They don't listen to me.
 It depends on who the teacher/ adult was.
 They don't do anything.

Fear-based Responses:

They usually have the bully come in to talk to and then the bully finds out who told the teachers.
 The teachers make you remember it and take it all apart and freak you out again.
 I wouldn't know what they would do to those people (bullies) and I wouldn't want to be responsible for it.
 I'm scared.
 It might get worse if I tell.
 Once you tell, they know it was you who told and will never stop bullying you.

Other Responses:

I don't care.
 It's never been that bad. It's not worth it.
 It was just a stolen item and I can always get a new one.
 I don't want to get involved.
 I can handle it by myself or with friends.
 I would feel like a tattletale.
 Time.