

Solutions to School Bullying Through Programs

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### Solutions to School Bullying Through Programs

A student's school performance is easily influenced by the social problems that arise in daily life. The common occurrence of bullying, which includes the power imbalance between individuals, has the possibility of causing physical and mental distress and is one of the many social problems that impacts these students. With the proper aid and program support, children who are both victims and aggressors can do well in their academics. The intent of this research paper is to discuss solutions to bullying in BC schools for children between the ages of 5-19 through the implementation of programs by providing information taken from research studies.

#### **Literature Review**

In "Meeting the Needs of Young Adolescents: ABBL Anti- Bullying Program During Middle School Transition" (Wójcik & Hełka 2019), a program was implemented as a way of putting a stop to instances of bullying in middle school. Research was done on six middle schools randomly chosen out of those that had accepted the invitations for the research. These middle school participants were located in the Silesian region of Poland. The participants consisted of ninety-six middle school students that ranged between the ages of 12 and 15 years, there were 45 girls and 51 boys (Wójcik & Hełka, 2019). In the study, the six schools each had one class dedicated for the ABBL program, while another class would participate as the control group. The programs were carried out by the homeroom teachers during the first three months of the school year, a time when students had the opportunity to meet new people and make new connections (Wójcik & Hełka, 2019). Peer connections aid in helping students feel included in the school domain and discourages bullying behaviour (Wójcik & Hełka, 2019).

After the program implementation period the students were given an online survey meant to inform the researchers if the program had decreased bullying behaviours in the middle schools. The questionnaires in the online survey pertained to topics such as physical aggression, verbal aggression, relational aggression, sexual aggression and online aggression. The variety of the question topics gives a better overview of bullying circumstances that occur at the school. Through the application of the ABBL program it was found that bullying still continued; however, bullying became reduced and suppressed after the intervention (Wójcik & Helka, 2019).

Teachers working in middle schools in BC may want to consider taking the first three months of the year for transitioning students to implement this program in their classrooms. This program is a good way for students to make connections with their peers and develop an acceptance of each other's differences (Wójcik & Helka, 2019). Students will become mindful and conscious of bullying behaviour, and increase the likelihood of intervention when they see inappropriate behaviour taking place (Wójcik & Helka, 2019).

In the article “Quest for the Golden Rule: An effective social skills promotion and bullying prevention program” by Rubin-Vaughan, Pepler, Brown & Craig (2011), an e-learning program was implemented for bullying prevention in elementary school. The e-learning program called *Quest of the Golden Rule* is for preventing bullying, it is seen to be effective to help prevent bullying. In this program different topics of bullying prevention are assigned to students grades two to five through three modules and games, which are *Bark Academy*, *Mission to Mars* and *Ghoul School* (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). *Bark Academy* provided “an introduction to social justice, safety and fairness” in school (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011, 168). *Mission to Mars* taught students the necessary social skills for making friends (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011).

*Ghoul School* discussed important issues on how to deal with bullying circumstances and encourage them to safely reject and inform teachers about school bullying.

(Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). Several grade six teachers had adopted the modules and had their students participate in the research study (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). For each module and game the sample size and participants vary, offering a wider range of data to be collected and reviewed. The number of participants who completed *Bark Academy*, *Mission to Mars* and *Ghoul School* were 307, 226 and 438 students respectively (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). Participants were required to play the game and submit a questionnaire for each of the games they played. Majority of the response options for the questions are based on a five-point Likert scale. After the implementation of this program, the outcome showed great success and effectiveness in reducing bullying in elementary school.

Teachers working in elementary schools can consider using this program as it is a solution to preventing bullying. This program provides an important education about bullying prevention and it can help students improve their social skills and maintain healthy relationships (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). Students can gain an opportunity to learn problem-solving skills and how to react in certain situations. Moreover, “play” is very important for children and adolescents (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011). As Vygotsky argued, “play creates the opportunity for children to experiment with acting more mature than their developmental stages” (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011, 167).

In “The support group approach in the Dutch KiVa anti-bullying programme: effects on victimisation, defending and well-being at school” (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016), bullying intervention is addressed through the support group approach. This support group approach is adapted by Dutch researchers and is taken from the KiVa anti-bullying program from Finland (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016).

The research study was designed to test the efficiency of the support group approach, and increase sympathy for victims in order to increase the defending of victims (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016). Research was conducted in 66 Dutch elementary schools, consisting of 30 girls and 26 boys, ranging from the ages 7-12. Originally there were 56 victims, but due to some missing information some students were taken out of the research, leaving the sample group with 38 victims.

The program was set up where the victims would be interviewed first and had to explain what had been happening for researchers to gain a better understanding of the situation. Then support groups were put together and normally had 6-8 children per support group. The groups consisted of the bullies and their supporters, as well as the defenders or friends of the victim. After about a week, there was a follow up meeting to see if there was any change for both the victim and the support group. From this program the researchers found that the support groups did reduce bullying in the short term, but later in the school year the bullying had continued (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016). On a positive note, victims did have more peers willing to protect the victim by the end of the school semester (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016).

In BC teachers may want to have programs that offer support groups, which target all school aged children, but can be beneficial as it can reduce some bullying initially and increases defending of victims (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016). Although bullying did continue in the research, it is a good idea for BC schools to have some form of support group that increases the number of defenders. The more defenders of victims the greater the possibility of reducing bullying (Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra, 2016).

In “The Implementation of a Statewide Bullying Prevention Program: Preliminary Findings from the Field and the Importance of Coalitions” by Schroeder, Messina, Schroeder, Good, Barto, Saylor & Masiello (2012), a program called Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is highly effective in reducing bullying rates. It is known to reduce 30% to 50% of school-based bullying when the program was applied (Schroeder et al., 2012).

OBPP has four sections to enable schools to resolve bullying in a systematic way, that revolves around educating staff throughout the school; classroom activities include having discussions, meetings, role playing and carrying out school anti-bullying guides with the students; the separate parts of OBPP work to guide the school's response, including in-site interventions, meetings to keep track with bullied students and students who are bullying other students; community involvement, including local governments and law enforcement partners, can support by providing time, resources, and information for the program success (Schroeder et al., 2012). There were around 100,000 students from more than 70 schools in grades K-12 in Pennsylvania who participated in the program. This program is a 3-year evaluation and the goal is to develop positive changes in the schools by the end of the evaluation (Schroeder et al., 2012). There were 56,137 students and more than 2,400 teachers who participated in the 2-year period. These participants were from 107 schools across Pennsylvania in the United States (Schroeder et al., 2012).

Bullying can lead to a variety of issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts and abuse. Many of these students end up lacking a sense of satisfaction in personal and academic matters. Moreover, it makes students feel unsafe or fearful (Schroeder et al., 2012). It will also lead to the decreasing of academic performance, increasing dropout rates and absence from school.

Schools can implement OBPP as it is “the most widely accepted, internationally recognized, evidence-based health promotion program” that aims to succeed in resolving bullying issues in schools (Schroeder et al., 2012, 494).

The article “Proposed modification of a school-wide bully prevention program to support all children” by Ostrander, Melville, Bryan & Letendre (2018) mentioned the prevention of bullying can be achieved through the Positive Behaviour Support program. This program prepares teachers for dealing with bullying by expanding consciousness about bullying and intervention techniques (Ostrander et al., 2018). For the study, research was done on an elementary school in the United States, with 21 people participating across the five groups. 15 were female and 6 were male. 16 of the participants were White or Caucasian, 4 were Latino or Hispanic, and 1 was African American. Each focus group was made up of three to seven participants and was implemented for around sixty to ninety minutes (Ostrander et al., 2018). This evaluation of PBIS bully prevention program showed that with teachers working together, children can learn skills to prevent harmful relationships with peers (Ostrander et al., 2018).

Teachers play an important role when it comes to preventing bullying. When they lack training, they cannot identify students in the classes who are suffering from being bullied. With these bullying prevention programs, teachers can develop a wider perception when it comes to social development and learning styles of their students (Ostrander et al., 2018). These important skills that teachers develop should be taught to students as it teaches individuals to calm their feelings or speak up when they are victimized (Ostrander et al., 2018).

### Discussion

Each of the articles mentioned in this paper explained both the research that worked in preventing bullying in schools and the limitations of the research. From the research done it can be said that the best way to put a stop to different forms of bullying in school is for teachers to educate the students and implement programs on bullying topics as soon as possible. Young students should develop a sense of acceptance for one another and be more aware and sensitive to bullying behaviour in order to create a safer and more accepting school environment.

Whether it be victims or aggressors, schools should have some kind of support system in place. A support system can be a peer group, teachers or adults who can help. Despite these programs offering solutions to bullying issues, there are still limitations to be mentioned that affect the full success of preventing bullying.

In 2019, Wójcik & Hełka the limitation was the small number of participants that took part in the research. A small sample size hindered the ability of researchers to come to a general conclusion that the program implementation was effective for all students. After participating in the ABBL programs, the self-reporting done by the students in Wójcik & Hełka (2019) research may have been lacking in truthful answers. Students became aware that bullying is not an acceptable behaviour in the classroom, hence are less willing to come forward about acts of bullying taking place.

The limitations for the research done by Rubin-Vaughan, Pepler, Brown & Craig in 2011, was that it wasn't implemented using a "full experimental design", the outcomes were typically "consistent with those of the *FearNot!* program" in a way that achievements in knowledge and behaviours were discovered for those students who played the games (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011, 173).

Moreover, another limitation was that researchers lack information on students' involvement in victimizing, witnessing or behaving as a bully, which may be the reason why the program was very successful.

The limitations for research done by Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra (2016), was the small sample size. The small sample size may have been due to teachers preference in solving bullying on their own, rather than using the support groups approach. A second limitation for Van der Ploeg, Steglich & Veenstra (2016) was during the second round of questionnaires, where research was to follow up with students progress with support groups. In this follow up students may have been more likely to report improvements with the program to satisfy the KiVa team.

The program from Ostrander, Melville, Bryan & Letendre (2018) research required adjusting, as there are many challenges to the widespread use of programs for specific types of students, as well as the need to consider cultural standards. Participants noted the significance of proposing continuous training to strengthen the abilities of the school staff, students and parents (Ostrander et al., 2018).

There are many ways to use these bullying prevention programs in our life. *Quest for the Golden Rule* can be used in elementary students as it contains three different games that students can play to learn bullying prevention. This can be effective for children in elementary schools because they would be interested in the program as they are games. The developers did a great job in studying what would be effective, interesting and suitable for elementary school students.

PBIS can be used to train new or experienced teachers. Teachers can use this opportunity to learn more about how to reduce and deal with bullying in school.

They learn skills of ways to talk to students about bullying, whether it is students being bullied, students bullying others or students who witness bullying.

Finding the solutions to bullying is no easy task; however, future research will continue to build upon the success of the programs mentioned in this paper. Continuing to develop students awareness, having support groups and having well educated teachers who can help settle bullying matters will decrease these issues at school and allow for students school experience to be safe and enjoyable.

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