



Recommended Organization-wide Approach to Address Bullying

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Abstract: Bullying is becoming more and more recognised as a wellbeing concern in Australia and throughout the world. It has a significant detrimental influence on kids, according to research. The purpose of this study is to look into the prevalence of bullying, its effects, and possible coping strategies. The topic of bullying was addressed based on a study of the literature and prevalence statistics. The results revealed that bullying may be addressed through a variety of approaches, including the introduction of SEL programs and the employment of a whole-school approach. To cope with bullying, it is advised that a SEL team be formed, the schoolhouse be assessed, good school values be instilled, and staff preparedness be increased.

Keywords: student wellbeing, bullying, SEL, whole-school approach

1. Introduction

Schools are a crucial setting in which to promote students' wellbeing and academic achievement (Cahill et al., 2014). One of the major risk factors for student wellbeing at the school level is bullying. Bullying refers to a form of aggressive behaviour in which there is an imbalance of power favouring the perpetrator(s) who repeatedly seek to hurt or intimidate a targeted individual (Rigby & Smith, 2011). It can have substantial impacts on not only victims but also perpetrators and witnesses, as well as the broader social environment (Rigby & Johnson, 2016). Nevertheless, the implementation of a whole-school social and emotional learning (SEL) approach is believed beneficial to prevent and reduce bullying. Successful implementation of SEL could build resilience, reducing the risk of passively accepting bullying and makes students feel safer and less likely to bully (Nickerson et al., 2019).

This paper has been divided into three parts. First, this paper explains the prevalence data considering the impact of the bullying and compares local data to broader research-based data. Second, this paper examines research-based prevention approaches to bullying and evaluate key findings regarding the whole-school approach. Finally, this paper provides some implication strategies.

2. Prevalence data

Bullying is a significant wellbeing issue across the world, Australian schools are no exception (Pearce et al., 2011). According to ACBPS (2009), there are a total of 26.7% bullying victimisation, and a total of 8.8% of students have bullied others in Australia. Their data also indicates that around 23% of bullying victimisation in Victoria and around 7.9% of students have bullied others. Moreover, bullying is quite severe in early secondary grades. They found that Year 8 is among the highest of the year groups to indicate they are bullied and have bullied others. Year 9 also had a high prevalence estimate for bullying others. Finally, little differences were found between genders for bullying victimisation overall, yet females compare to males reported are more likely to be bullied covertly (Cross et al., 2009).

3. Impact of bullying

At the school-wide level, bullying behaviour will affect the school climate. According to Durlak et al. (2011), student perceptions are crucial to school climate. Students who are bullied tend to feel unsafe in school, which leads to a negative perception of school. Moreover, bullying could increase the cost of the school as it associates with violent behaviour and leads to delinquency, anxiety, depression, and truancy (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Those issues will require physical and psychological treatment provided by the school. At the individual level, bullying others and bullying victimisation has negative social consequences for both groups (Cross et al., 2009). Bullying victimisation often associates with immediate harm and negative long-term mental, social, and physical health outcomes (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Bullying others is also linked to negative mental health outcomes and a higher risk of delinquent conduct (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

4. Universal prevention

As bullying increasingly becomes a top concern of the public, a growing number of studies have proposed multiple prevention approaches to reduce bullying. Studies of antibullying programs have shown that single-level programs are unlikely to provide an effective solution due to the complex nature of bullying (Smith et al., 2004). Instead, research indicates that multi-disciplinary whole-school interventions are the most effective ways to prevent and manage bullying (Cross et al., 2009). Incorporating the establishment of school-wide rules and consequences for bullying; the furnishing of proper and adequate teacher training; and the cultivation of conflict resolution strategies through curriculum were found to be more effective than offering classroom curriculum and social skill training alone (Pearce et al., 2011). Besides, to reduce bullying and victimisation, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) have summarised a series of approaches. They found that the most effective program components associated with the reduction of bullying victimisation were the use of videos, disciplinary methods, parents training/meeting and cooperative group work between professionals. Furthermore, the most effective program components to reduce bullying among others were: parents training/meeting, teacher training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, cooperative group work between professionals, school assemblies, information for parents, classroom rules and classroom management, and a whole-school antibullying policy.

5. Program duration

Besides, studies have shown that the intensity and duration of a program are directly associated with its effectiveness (Olweus, 2005). This means the programs must be long enough to have enough time for students to build up their social and emotional capabilities and the school ethos. According to Durlak et al. (2011), program duration and intensity for students and teachers leads to a significant decrease in rates of both bullying others and bullying victimisation. When a program is intensive and spread across multiple year levels, this program can likely provide adequate resources including teaching and learning materials, proper planning and training (Elias et al., 2015).

6. Whole-school approach

According to Pearce et al. (2011), an antibullying whole-school approach usually targets several levels, including the school level (school policies, school climate, behaviour support, peer support, and schoolyard improvements); the classroom level (the curriculum); the home level (engaging and involving parents); and the individual level (working with higher risk students). To begin with, at the school level, a strong leadership and facilitating team is of vital importance. A principal who has prioritised bullying prevention is more likely to increase the commitment of their staff (Pearce et al., 2011). Also, establishing a whole-school antibullying policy was significantly related to bullying reduction (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). A clear and strong message will be sent to the school community that bullying is not acceptable. According to Olweus's program, firm disciplinary methods, including serious talks with bullies, sending them to the principal, making them stay close to the teacher during recess time, or take away their privileges were significantly effective to reduce both bullying and victimisation (Olweus, 2005). Besides, at the classroom level, analyses have found that the use of classroom rules against bullying, emphasis on classroom management techniques to identify and respond to bullying, were both effective in bullying reduction (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Moreover, bullying prevention approaches should go beyond the scope of the school and target broader factors, for example, the family or the community. Parents training and meeting was found significantly useful in the reduction of bullying and victimisation (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). There must be a recognition that reduces bullying is not only the responsibility of the school but also the wider community. Several studies found that students who have a good relationship with their family members are reported less involved with bullying (Wang et al., 2009). Whereas inadequate supervision, lack of attention at home, acceptance of aggressive behaviour, harsh discipline, and parent modelling of aggressive behaviour increases bullying behaviour (Pearce et al., 2011). Finally, at the individual level, a multi-tiered system can be applied to provide specific support to students with different needs for bullying reduction (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

7. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL involves explicitly teaching skills (recognising and managing emotions, developing relationships, responsible decision-making) and leads to improved academic functioning and social competence, better school attendance, less disruptive classroom behaviour, reduced need for discipline, and lower rates of suspensions (Durlak et al., 2011). There is growing support for, and recognition of the role of using SEL approaches to reduce bullying (Nickerson, 2019). For students who are being bullied, SEL exerts its effects by promoting their social-emotional skills and buffer them from the harmful effects of bullying (Smith & Low, 2013). For students who bully others, SEL teaches them skills such as relationship skills,

emotional management, and gender awareness to reduce aggressive behaviours (Cahill et al., 2018).

8. Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (4Rs) program

The most promising bullying prevention approaches are universal, multi-component, skills-based interventions, including SEL and positive behaviour interventions (Nickerson, 2019). Moreover, policymakers should adopt high-quality, evidence-based programs that have been appraised to be effective (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). One of the SEL programs that include the approaches mentioned above is the 4Rs program. This program provides teaching and learning materials for schools to develop students' social, emotional, and positive relationship skills and reduces antisocial behaviours. It is designed to align with the Victoria curriculum and covers eight topics of SEL across all levels of primary and secondary education (Cahill et al., 2018). The topics are Emotional literacy, Personal strengths, Positive coping, Problem-solving, Stress management, Help-seeking, Gender and identity, and Positive gender relations. The first six topics would effectively work to reduce bullying in general, and the last two topics can reduce gender-based bullying.

9. Implications

To ensure the RRRR program can be implemented with sustainability, Elias et al. (2015) have proposed a series of activities to guide school-level SEL implementation. The following paragraph will discuss the activities mentioned by Elias et al. (2015) in a sequential way to form a plan of action.

Firstly, some entity, for example, a committee, workgroup or a team, must have responsibility for the long-term implementation of SEL-related approaches and for unjumbling the schoolhouse. A distributed leadership with clear responsibilities is essential. An SEL team made of people from the leadership team, teachers, student representatives, parent representatives and SEL experts should be established to ensure the successful implementation.

Secondly, there is a need to access the schoolhouse of the subject school. Adding new programs and initiatives without explicit articulation with what already exists will increase pressure and competition for time, resources, and focus within the school. A careful examination of all SEL related efforts will help to increase effectiveness. Besides, the adaptation of evidence-based programs, for example, the RRRR program, will assist the assessment process, as the evidence base of the RRRR program demonstrates what the specific lesson is offering.

Thirdly, the articulation of shared values can build up a supportive school culture and a protective school environment. Creating and maintain a school ethos that discourages bullying is critical to reducing bullying. This allows students to learn the values within and across grade levels and reduce fragmentation and increase the likelihood that students will be inspired. Also, the social and emotional learning provided in the RRRR program will add to the building of school ethos. For example, students who bully others demonstrate a negative relationship with their teachers and parents (Pearce et al., 2011). The building of positive relationship skills offered by the 4Rs program is appraised suitable for the improvement to take place.

Finally, the readiness of the faculty needs to be improved. The teaching team needs to have a deep understanding of the theory and literature and pedagogy of SEL to enable successful implementation. More time should be spent on teacher training to support staff members with the necessary skills. Again, the 4Rs program provides evidence-based lesson plans, which will inform the purpose of a particular lesson and get teachers ready for the teaching.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has discussed the wellbeing issue of bullying. Findings have reflected that bullying is a critical issue around the world. This paper has examined evidence-based prevention approaches regarding this issue. It can be found that most of the interventions are conducted at the universal level, for example, school-wide policy and rules, due to the complex nature of bullying. However, a multi-tiered system should be applied to facilitate individual needs. SEL programs have been evaluated as effective in bullying reduction. The 4Rs program has been proposed as it offers SEL to students and evidence base for teachers. Last, a series of research-informed implications have been proposed, including establishing an SEL team, access the schoolhouse, articulate shared values, and improve faculty readiness.

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