The Role of Elementary School Counselors in Reducing School Bullying

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Abstract

In this article, I review the literature on school bullying with an emphasis on elementary schools. Bullying is defined and described, 3 types of bullying are discussed, and the importance of relational bullying is emphasized. I review existing programs to reduce bullying with attention to empirical studies. Barriers to implementation of effective programs are acknowledged. Given the expertise and role of elementary school counselors, they are in a unique position to be leaders in reducing school bullying, a view that is consistent with the American School Counseling Association national model for professional school counseling. I suggest ways in which school counselors can have a significant influence on school bullying, outline implications of research for best practice, and discuss the need for future research.

Although scholarly interest in school bullying in the United States has lagged behind that of other countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, public concern and research attention have increased in recent years, in part due to highly publicized incidents of school violence. Investigations by the Secret Service revealed that in two-thirds of the high-profile cases of school shootings, the perpetrators had been chronic victims of bullying, and revenge was a prominent motivation (Dedman, 2000). Dan Olweus's seminal research on school bullying in Norway in the early 1980s was prompted by several suicides that were attributed to despair caused by chronic victimization by bullies.

Such incidents may be rare, but bullying is not. The largest national study in the United States to date found that that 29.9% of students in grades 6 through 10 reported

"moderate or frequent" involvement in bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). The number of victims in elementary grades has been estimated at twice that of secondary students (Ross, 1996), which means that bullying affects a very large number of students in U.S. elementary schools. Bullying "may be the most prevalent form of violence in the schools and the form that is likely to affect the greatest number of students" (Batsche, 2002, p. 171). Most bullying occurs in school rather than on the journey to and from school and is particularly prevalent in areas with minimal adult supervision. Playgrounds, hallways, and restrooms are common locations for incidents of bullying, although classrooms are not immune (Payne & Gottfredson, 2004).

Defining Bullying

The generally accepted definition describes bullying as a subset of aggression with three components: (*a*) intent to harm, (*b*) repetition, and (*c*) a power imbalance between the bully and the target or victim. Bullying is distinguished from conflict by unequal power between the persons involved. Although this definition, originally proposed by Olweus (1993), provides a common basis for communicating about the topic, it is not without limitations for schools. First, intent is difficult to detect, and the perpetrator can dismiss the charge of bullying by claiming, "It was an accident. I didn't mean it." The repetitive nature of bullying is undoubtedly a contributor to the harmful effects, but an action toward a victim cannot be dismissed because it is a single (or initial) occurrence. The key component of the definition is the power imbalance. The bully uses his or her power (which may be due to physical attributes or social standing) against a weaker student who is unable to defend him/herself. Thus, Smith and Sharp (1994) suggested a more concise definition: "a systematic abuse of power" (p. 2).

This common definition also creates the impression that bullying is a dyadic encounter, involving two parties. However, recognizing the important role played by bystanders, Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2004) proposed an alternate definition: "bullying is the repeated exposure of an individual to negative interactions directly or indirectly inflicted by one or more dominant persons. The harm may be caused through direct physical or psychological means and/or indirectly through encouragement of the process or avoidance by the bystander" (p. 221).

Types of Bullying

In addition to a common definition, it is now widely accepted that there are several different types of bullying. Overt bullying includes both physical and verbal bullying. Examples are pushing, hitting, shoving, name-calling, threatening, and malicious teasing. Indirect bullying involves relational aggression, in which the harm is inflicted by damaging the target's relationships. For example, relational bullying involves social exclusion, spreading rumors, and demanding compliance as a condition of friendship.

Relational bullying has been perceived erroneously as less harmful than overt forms of bullying and may be discounted as normative female behavior (Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999). Relational bullying is more strongly related to emotional distress than is physical bullying (Hawker, 1998) and has been found to be uniquely predictive of current (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Crick, 1996; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) and future (Crick, 1996; Espelage, Mebane, & Swearer, 2004) social and psychological maladjustment, as well as depression in adulthood (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Victims of bullying indicated that social exclusion was the worst form of bullying (Sharp, 1995), although teachers tend to treat this as the least serious (Birkinshaw & Eslea, 1998).

Although physical bullying tends to decrease with age, relational bullying does not (Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002). Moreover, relational bullying has been found to increase in schools when direct bullying decreases (Woods & Wolke, 2003). Vail (2002) concluded that schools focus on physical aggression and lack policies to deal with relational aggression. For both males and females, relational bullying has a stronger link to depression than does direct bullying; relational bullying and indirect forms of bullying likely "cause the greatest amount of suffering, while they have a greater chance of going unnoticed by teachers" (van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003, p. 1312). Elementary school counselors have a particular interest in enhancing students' interpersonal skills and helping students develop positive friendship skills. Counselors can apply their knowledge and skills to reduce relational bullying and assist victims.

My research has confirmed the relation between victimization by relational bullying and depressive symptoms in elementary students in a small Southwestern community. In a study of 116 Mexican American students in grades 3 through 5, the only significant predictor of depression was victimization by relational bullying. Gender, grade level, overt bullying, and acculturation status had no effect (Bauman, 2006). I obtained similar outcomes with middle school students in an ethnically diverse school in a midsized Southwestern city (Bauman, in press).

Yoon and Kerber (2003) found that 94 elementary teachers rated vignettes of physical bullying as the most serious type of bullying event, followed by scenarios of verbal and relational bullying, in that order. Participants rated each of six vignettes (two each of physical, verbal, and relational bullying) on a five-point scale for seriousness (not at all serious to very serious), the degree of empathy for the victim (not at all sympathetic to very sympathetic), and the likelihood of intervening in the situation (not at all likely to very likely). Note that the authors used the term "empathy" for this subscale, although the wording of the item uses the term "sympathy." Teachers also had the least empathy for victims of relational bullying and were least likely to intervene in relational bullying incidents. Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) used the same questionnaire with a sample of 183 school counselors in one state, with similar results. School counselors rated the relational bullying incidents as less serious than physical or verbal bullying and had the least empathy for victims of relational bullying. They were more likely to intervene in verbal bullying than in relational bullying and proposed less serious consequences for bullies using this tactic. However, counselors with antibullying training rated relational bullying as more serious than those without such training, and female counselors rated relational bullying as more serious than did male counselors. Counselors who worked in schools with antibullying programs in place were more likely to intervene in verbal and relational bullying incidents than those who worked in schools without such programs. When the results were compared to those of the teachers in the Yoon and Kerber sample, counselors obtained higher scores on all variables (seriousness, empathy for victim, willingness to intervene) than teachers. School counselors are likely to have training and skills to intervene in incidents of school bullying.

Consequences of Bullying

The literature has consistently reported negative consequences associated with bullying. Both bullies and victims are more likely to evidence social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005) than their uninvolved peers. Victims exhibit higher rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem, and these effects persist into adulthood (Leff, Power, & Goldstein, 2004). Peer rejection, delinquent behavior, criminality, violence, and suicidal ideation

have also been identified as outcomes of bullying involvement (Marsh, Parada, Craven, & Finger, 2004). There is no question that the problem is serious and worthy of attention.

Cyberbullying

The proliferation of technology has provided students with new methods of bullying. The term *cyberbullying* (coined by Canadian Bill Belsey) refers to this recent development. "Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others" (Belsey, n.d.). The scant research on this form of bullying suggests that it is at least as prevalent as more established methods. Kowalski et al. (2005) reported that 25% of middle school girls and 11% of boys had been cyberbullied within the previous 2 months, and 13% of girls and 9% of boys admitted cyberbullying someone else. Of the bullied students, 63% were bullied by a schoolmate.

Dealing with Bullying

There is considerable evidence that schools are not effective at combating bullying. For example, Craig and Pepler (1997) found that playground supervisors intervened in only 4% of bullying incidents. Doll, Song, and Siemers (2004) reported that students do not tell teachers about bullying incidents because they perceive teachers as "inept, uncaring, or unable to protect them" (p. 169). Atlas and Pepler (1998) observed that teachers intervened in only 18% of bullying incidents that occurred in their elementary and middle school classes, and 40% of elementary students and 60% of junior high students reported that teachers do nothing when victims tell them about bullying incidents (Hoover & Hazler, 1991). Furthermore, 70% of teachers in one study (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995) believed that teachers intervene "almost always" in bullying situations, whereas only 25% of the students agreed with their assessment.

Of interest is a current study (Bauman & Rigby, 2006) in which both teachers and school counselors were surveyed using the Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ; Rigby, 2006) about their methods for handling an incident of school bullying. The HBQ contains 22 items in which respondents indicate the likelihood of taking a given action in response to the scenario provided on a five-point scale (from "I definitely would" to "I definitely would not"). Five subscales were identified using principal components analysis. The sample consisted of 601 educators, 66% of whom were school counselors. Of the 385 counselors, 48% worked in elementary or K–8 schools. Statistically significant differences between teachers and school counselors were detected on four of the five subscales. Counselors were more likely to say they would work with the victim and would enlist other adults (including parents) in the solution. They were less likely than teachers to ignore or dismiss the incident and less likely to use punitive disciplinary strategies. The only subscale on which there was no difference was the Work with Bully subscale. Teachers and counselors both indicated they would work with (as opposed to punish) the bully in order to resolve the problem. These results point to the elementary school counselor as the logical person in the school to take a leadership role in efforts to reduce bullying.

Teachers and other school personnel tend to overestimate their effectiveness in bullying intervention (Holt & Keyes, 2004). One noted U.S. researcher commented, "Unfortunately, adults within the school environment dramatically overestimate their effectiveness in identifying and intervening in bullying situations" (Susan Limber, quoted in Crawford, 2002, p. 65). Teachers' lack of intervention "plays a crit-

ical role in sanctioning the bullying behavior that occurs in schools, either intentionally or unintentionally" (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004, p. 260).

Effectiveness of Antibullying Programs

Smith and Ananiadou (2003) reviewed the evaluation research on antibullying programs. Olweus conducted the largest project in Bergen, Norway, in the early 1980s. His comprehensive school-wide program addressed bullying at multiple levels—the entire school, the classroom, and the individual. At the school level, the Olweus program called for a questionnaire to be administered to students to determine the prevalence of bullying, a school conference day on bullying, increased supervision on playgrounds, meetings with staff and parents, and the formation of teachers' groups to focus on improving overall school climate (Olweus, 1993). At the classroom level, student involvement in developing classroom rules against bullying was followed by regular classroom meetings to discuss bullying problems, role-playing activities and the use of literature related to bullying, and the use of cooperative learning strategies. When bullying did occur, Olweus's model called for "serious talks" (p. 64) with involved students and their parents, help from "neutral" students, help and support for parents, and, if none of those actions was successful, changing the class or school of involved students. In fact, the program was part of a national antibullying campaign, which may have also affected outcomes. Results of the program revealed a 50% decrease in student self-reported bullying.

However, shortly thereafter, another Norwegian researcher (Roland, 1989) evaluated a similar program in another part of the country, with very different outcomes. He found increased bullying among boys during the years of program implementation. One explanation of the marked difference in results is that Olweus and his team were directly involved in the program, whereas Roland provided materials but no other support. A large-scale study conducted in Sheffield, England, with many similarities to the Olweus program, had positive results: an average of 17% more students reported not being bullied, and 7% fewer students reported bullying others after the 2-year program. One finding from this research is particularly noteworthy: the best outcomes were obtained in schools with the strongest commitment to the program, which typically had a designated staff member coordinating the program, and strong administrative support. Elementary school counselors are ideally suited to be that designated staff member and to enlist administrative support.

Other programs, in England, Canada, Germany, and Belgium reported mixed results, with only modest effects after the initial successful intervention in Bergen. One large-scale study was conducted in the United States in rural South Carolina schools. The Olweus model was used, with additional materials and community involvement. Again, results were mixed; 25% fewer students in the experimental schools reported bullying other children after the 2-year intervention, whereas those in control schools reported increased bullying. However, there was no significant difference between experimental and control schools in the number of students being bullied, measured by student self-report (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003).

Twemlow and his colleagues tested a violence-prevention program directed at reducing bullying and other forms of violence in two inner-city elementary schools in the Midwest (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, Evans, et al., 2001). The program is based on a model of bullying as a triadic interaction of bully, victim, and bystander. School staff is usually in the bystander role in this model. The intervention included four elements: zero tolerance for bullying and other violence, a specific discipline

plan based on modeling of appropriate behaviors, a specialized physical education curriculum to teach self-regulation, and a mentoring program using older children and adults. Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, Evans, et al. (2001) proclaimed a "dramatic reduction in disciplinary referrals" in the experimental school, with no change in the control school. Suspension rates in the experimental school also declined significantly in contrast to the control school, where no change was detected. It is important to note that there was a significant increase in academic performance in the experimental school, as measured by scores on an achievement test, whereas scores in the control school did not change. School counselors who are seeking a rationale for implementing an antibullying program might note that academic performance improved when bullying decreased.

The Expect Respect program was developed with support from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003). The project was based on Olweus's model and included classroom curriculum, staff training, policy development, parent education, and support services. School counselors received additional training in order to provide responsive services to students involved in bullying. Initial evaluation, based on surveys of students and staff, yielded disappointing results. Only 19% of students in the intervention group were able to identify bullying behaviors at posttest. An increase in student reports of bullying behaviors was attributed to heightened awareness as a result of the program. Despite these limited results, researchers learned that students expected the adults at school to tell them to ignore bullying behaviors, and the proportion of students who endorsed that response increased postintervention. Only 7% of staff indicated that they would respond by telling students to ignore the incident. School counselors must remember this finding: one element of a successful program is convincing students that the adults are committed to action and trained to help.

A more recently developed program, Steps to Respect, reported more encouraging results. In the second year of implementation, data revealed reductions in bullying, victimization, and destructive bystander behaviors (Frey, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005). This program is another school-wide intervention that focuses on clear antibullying policies and procedures, training for adults, and the support of socially responsible behavior. The program includes classroom curricula and coaching for children involved in bullying.

Vreeman and Carroll (2007) reviewed research on school-based interventions to reduce bullying and found 26 studies that used control and intervention groups and an evaluation of measured outcomes that had been published in English. Of 10 studies evaluating curricular interventions, six showed no decline in bullying. The other four, although finding a decrease in bullying overall, detected increased bullying in certain populations or when using specific measures. The only study that showed clear improvement did not measure incidents of bullying; children's responses to a hypothetical bullying situation was the outcome measure. Of the 10 studies evaluating whole-school or systemic interventions, seven reported positive outcomes. The discrepant results of Olweus and Roland described above were included in this group of studies. Four studies examined the effects of interventions with targeted groups of children (two for aggressive children and two for victims of bullying). Only one study of third-grade children showed positive outcomes. Participants in the other studies were older (sixth through eighth grade). Finally, a study of a single program placing social workers in high-risk schools in England found decreased bullying at the elementary level only, and an intervention using mentors with 28 fourth-grade students reported less bullying and aggression

postintervention for program students than a control group who did not have mentors. The implications for elementary school counselors from this review are that curriculum alone is unlikely to reduce bullying, that whole-school approaches addressing the problem at a systemic level are most likely to have positive outcomes when the staff is committed and involved, and that interventions targeted at specific groups of children are most likely to reduce bullying with younger children.

An excellent summary of research on school-based bullying prevention programs can be found in Samples (2004). I encourage elementary counselors to be informed about research results, because schools often select a program based on name recognition, cost, or other factors without regard for effectiveness research. As Juvonen and Graham (2004) observed, prevention programs are frequently created by professional curriculum developers rather than by experts in bullying prevention and intervention research. A school counselor can assist decision makers in taking into account all relevant variables, including research results and the local community context, to make an informed selection of a program with a high likelihood of success.

Barriers to Effective Antibullying Interventions

By 2005, 18 states had adopted formal bullying legislation (Greene & Ross, 2005). Although 13 of those include a definition of bullying, none includes all three elements I discussed (intent, repetition, and power imbalance). In fact, none of the laws mentions the power imbalance, considered by experts to be a defining characteristic of bullying. Only eight states require school employees to report acts of bullying. Most states require or recommend that school employees receive training about district bullying policies, or bullying prevention, but only Georgia penalizes schools for noncompliance with its antibullying law. The most common component of state legislation is that districts are to establish antibullying policies. Thus, state legislation is not likely to produce major changes in schools' efforts to reduce bullying, but it does perhaps raise awareness and signal educators that expectations exist for increased attention to bullying in schools.

Despite public proclamations by most constituencies (e.g., community and national leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, school counselors, and students) that bullying is not acceptable and that children have the right to be safe (both physically and psychologically) at school, there are many ways in which cultural practices contradict that belief. As one anonymous teacher responding to the Bauman and Rigby (2006) survey stated, "we are not addressing the whole problem. Children reflect the values and behavior they see in their homes, on television, in video games, and in the behaviors of famous personalities and world leaders." Social learning is a powerful process, and when children see role models (e.g., parents and other adults, including teachers) use bullying and intimidation tactics, they use these approaches to getting their own needs met and solving problems. Another respondent to the questionnaire observed, "As long as teachers model bullying and encourage bullying as an accepted mode of discipline through peer pressure, it will continue."

Racism and discrimination toward many oppressed groups (sexual minorities, homeless, etc.) are other pervasive examples that model elements of bullying. There are also attitudes that are still widely (although perhaps more privately) held that bullying is a normative experience and that victims somehow deserve the treatment they receive (Vernberg & Gamm, 2003). Within schools and school districts, there may be a lack of administrative support for antibullying measures. Some comments from participants in the survey of teachers

and counselors (Bauman & Rigby, 2006) are illustrative:

- I have found administrators who are responsible for working with bullies feel the behavior is "not that bad" or a "right [*sic*] of passage" and therefore they do not take reports of bullying seriously.
- Our school refuses to participate in [state's] Safe2Tell program. I think the principal is afraid of the number of calls that will be made. The problem is that the administration only believes that the target needs to write a statement about the incident. This robs the target of his or her confidentiality.
- I do the best I can, but I have no administration support. Bullies are left to roam free, as are their parents. The principal is afraid of bullies and cannot stand up to them.
- I took [program] training. My district did not pay for me to attend, nor do they support my actions in trying to stop bullying. It's very frustrating.

As schools take steps to address the problem of bullying, disagreements about appropriate strategies to take are likely. In addition, teachers and other staff (including lunchroom and playground monitors) may lack training. Time and money must be devoted to antibullying efforts if they are to succeed, but those are in short supply. And, in an educational environment so heavily influenced by the No Child Left Behind Act, educators may view antibullying efforts as distractions from academic pursuits. In the next section, I discuss the critical role of school counselors in overcoming these obstacles.

Implications for Practice

Many experts advise that antibullying programs are more likely to show positive effects when there is an identified person in the school to take a leadership role. Clarke and Kiselica (1997) urged "school counselors to become effective catalysts and advocates for systemic change" (p. 322). The counselor becomes a change agent in antiviolence and antibullying programs (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, & Hess, 2001). Hernández and Seem (2004) also commented on the leadership role in advocacy and implementation efforts. School counselors have unique skills that make them particularly well suited to a leadership role. Contemporary school counselors already are school leaders, consultants to other staff and to the larger community, classroom educators, parent educators, and individual and group counselors. They can collect and use data and are instrumental in establishing and maintaining a positive school climate. They are consensus builders and facilitators of task groups. Who better to assume responsibility and leadership in bullying reduction?

As a catalyst for change, the school counselor must obtain administrative support for antibullying efforts. Hopefully, the principal or superintendent will already be aware of the need to take action, and the counselor can provide the leadership necessary for designing and implementing interventions at the school or district level. School counselors must be armed with persuasive information, noting that bullying at school decreases academic success by distracting students and/or increasing school absenteeism and dropout rates (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). A sizable majority of students who Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver (1992) surveyed experienced academic difficulties as a result of bullying. Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) found that children who are victimized by social exclusion have reduced academic achievement. Such evidence is important when academic performance of students is the yardstick for accountability. School counselors also must be familiar with the literature on antibullying programs in order to assemble an effective case for their choices. For example, Smith and Ananiadou (2003) cited persuasive evidence that the optimal age for intervention is between 5 to 6 and 8 to 9, which suggests that kindergarten and the early elementary grades are logical places to focus. Elementary school counselors'

knowledge of child development allows them to tailor interventions to these grades.

An important initial step in establishing an effective program is the formation of a steering committee that works as a team to develop the program. The school counselor is familiar with all constituencies (students, teachers, other staff, parents, administrators, and community members) and has established relationships with key individuals in those groups. Facilitating and coordinating the work of such a group uses the school counselor's expertise. Many school counselors already have formed advisory committees and thus have experience assembling and leading a team dedicated to program improvement.

Counselors are able to provide training for staff, students, and parents about bullying. O'Moore (2000) proposed the essential content of teacher training: an understanding of what constitutes bullying, the extent of bullying, signs of victimization and bullying, the effects of bullying, causes of bullying behavior, and preventive strategies as well as strategies to deal with bullying incidents. She also described the necessary components of an effective antibullying policy. School counselors who can give teachers and other staff specific suggestions will establish credibility and earn respect from these colleagues.

Another key training need is for adult monitors/supervisors of unstructured time, such as lunch and recess. These personnel must have training in order to implement programs and policies, although it is sometimes assumed that their mere presence deters bullying. Data clearly show otherwise, and the school counselor can empower these individuals with not just antibullying training but skills to provide organized activities (such as noncompetitive games) for children to engage in, reducing the time and opportunities for bullying.

As noted above, teachers often lack information and hold attitudes and beliefs that are contrary to those of antibullying programs. With their excellent communication skills, counselors can design teacher training to address faculty concerns, and counselors know which staff members may need additional encouragement to participate. They can also work with teachers who need additional assistance. Many models include a classroom meeting component, and some teachers might feel uncomfortable or unequipped to manage open discussions of bullying. If the school counselor cofacilitates these meetings with the teacher until the teacher feels confident about conducting the meetings alone, the teacher has the support and modeling to become effective in this role.

The elementary school counselor needs to help others understand that some widely used strategies are not recommended for bullying situations. For example, peer mediation and other conflict-resolution programs are intended to assist peers in conflict to resolve a dispute. Because of the power imbalance in bullying, this can be terrifying and/or harmful to the victim, who is unlikely to have the confidence to confront the bully with his or her concerns and may fear retaliation. Although peer mediation programs are useful in resolving conflicts, bullying is different from conflict between peers, and the school counselor must emphasize this. Another approach that is often suggested but that is ill-advised is to form self-esteem-building groups for bullies. First, the evidence is strong that most bullies do not lack self-esteem, so the efforts are misplaced. More important, bringing together like-minded students who bully others can have the unintended effect of reinforcing their negative behaviors (see Dishion, McCord, and Poulin [1999] and Poulin, Dishion, and Burraston [2001] for research on the iatrogenic effects of group counseling with youth with negative behaviors).

School counselors also should be knowledgeable about the types of bullying and insist that policies, programs, and interventions target more than physical bullying. Because verbal and relational bully-

ing are often more difficult to detect, counselors must develop a reputation for both trustworthiness and effectiveness so that students will report incidents of such bullying to them. Research has been unequivocal in finding low rates of reporting to adults at school (e.g., Doll et al., 2004), and the counselor should be one person in the school to whom students can report safely. The increase in cyberbullying necessitates that the school counselor educate everyone, including students and parents, about how to deal with this form of bullying, which is unlikely to diminish without strong intervention.

School counselors have training in assessment and know how to use data to make decisions. It is imperative that data regarding prevalence, types, and location of bullying are collected prior to implementation to guide program design. Then, similar data can be collected and analyzed after implementation to monitor effectiveness of interventions. This evaluation step cannot be overemphasized, because schools can use the data both to demonstrate program effectiveness (if the data warrant) or to make programmatic adjustments to align the program more closely to school circumstances. Skeptical staff and administrators who see data that demonstrate how the program is making a difference, and for whom, are more likely to support the program.

In addition, elementary school counselors are already delivering guidance curriculum in classrooms, and working with students to teach skills and behaviors to combat bullying is a natural extension of this role. Addressing the role of the bystander and promoting altruism among students who witness bullying should be a part of classroom lessons. Most incidents of bullying are witnessed by others, whose behavior can encourage or discourage the bully. Hopefully, teachers will work with the counselor to reinforce skills and maximize teachable moments. The counselor might also wish to assemble a library of children's books dealing with bullying. These can be provided to teachers who are seeking stories to read to classes and to individual children for whom identifying with characters in books can be helpful.

Most antibullying programs include components of individual and/or group counseling for bullies and victims. The school counselor already provides these services. Counselors may wish to investigate strategies, such as the No Blame approach (Robinson & Maines, 1997) and the Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 2002), to engage students in generating and implementing solutions (Cowie, 2004). The work of Evelyn Field in Australia provides a model for working with victims to develop necessary social skills (Field, 2003). Young (2002) described a program of bullying prevention and intervention using the brief solution-focused counseling model, which many school counselors use. This approach is another that counselors can employ in their work with individuals and groups.

Working to reduce bullying is consistent with the American School Counselor Association national model (2003), which promotes classroom guidance, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. Classroom guidance is an important component of antibullying efforts, and working with children individually and in small groups is a responsive service. Educating staff, collecting data, and consulting with teachers and parents are all services that fall under system support. By leading school antibullying efforts, counselors will not only use their leadership and skills to reduce this serious problem, but they will enhance their professional status by employing a nationally recognized model of school counseling services.

To summarize, the school counselor is ideally suited for a central role in a school's antibullying efforts. To ensure that counselors are prepared for such roles, Fernandez (2000) urges counselor education programs to provide more than generic training in program development and planning and to

offer training that prepares counselors to address the pervasive and damaging problem of school bullying.

Suggestions for Future Research

Data on effectiveness of antibullying programs are mixed and difficult to interpret. There is a need for standard measures of prevalence rates, common definitions, and rigorous research designs. Leff et al. (2004) provide an excellent review of outcome measures that will assist researchers in selecting appropriate instruments. School counselors can collaborate with university scholars to design their evaluations to include a comparison or control group and valid and reliable measures. Particularly in the United States, where bullying research is relatively recent, many more studies are needed to determine what works and for whom and under what conditions.

In addition to program evaluation studies, the next step in research will be to determine which program elements are responsible for positive outcomes. With overall program evaluation, it is impossible to know which components are effective and which are not. For example, the Olweus study in Bergen included a variety of program interventions. A single intervention might have produced rates similar to the whole program; although that is unlikely, the results do not show which interventions are essential and which are extraneous. Some schools may choose to implement interventions successively and evaluate the effects of each. One clear target of a single intervention would be training playground and cafeteria monitors in what bullying is, how to detect it, and how to respond. Counselors can also train monitors to organize and encourage noncompetitive games to reduce the number of children who are not engaged in any structured activity. The school counselor can collect data before such training is provided (disciplinary incidents, suspensions, injuries taken to the school nurse, attendance, etc.) and again when the trained monitors have been employed for a reasonable period of time to detect any significant changes.

Additional research should be conducted at counselor education programs that provide antibullying training as part of the curriculum. Graduates can be surveyed and/or observed to evaluate the effect of such training.

Summary

School bullying is a significant and widespread problem with harmful consequences for all students. There is consensus on the definition of bullying and the various types of bullying, and many programs have been developed to prevent and reduce its occurrence in schools. The evidence of program effectiveness is far from conclusive, and is even disappointing, although whole-school approaches seem to have the best prognosis. School counselors are the staff members who are best equipped to advocate for concerted efforts to address the problem and to be leaders in program design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation. In short, counselors can contribute to the academic success of all students by taking a central role in school and district antibullying efforts.

Note

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