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Bullying: Who is at-risk, what are the effects, and what can we do to stop it?

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BULLYING: WHO IS AT-RISK, WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS, AND WHAT CAN WE DO TO STOP IT

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Abstract

The act of bullying is prevalent in today's society. The average student in the United States experiences bullying in some form at least once throughout their academic career. Bullying can be defined as any act defined by the victim that is repeated and results in the victim being hurt physically or mentally. Some subgroups of students are more likely to experience bullying victimization such as: females, heterosexuals (particularly male heterosexuals), welfare recipients, and students who receive special education services. The effects of experiencing victimization can be severe. There are short-term and long-term effects on both academic success and mental health. There have been anti-bullying interventions and programs that have been implemented in schools with documented success, however, more research needs to be done to ensure there is a decrease in the frequency of bullying incidences so students can feel safe in their learning environments.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to provide a condensed review of current literature related to the topic of bullying. This report contains information pertaining to topics such as: different forms of bullying; the effects that bullying (in any form) can have on the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystanders; and possible prevention strategies or programs that can be implemented.

The phenomenon of bullying is not a new concept to many people. In fact, a survey conducted by Espelage et al. (2000) concluded that a mere 19.5% of middle school students had *not* been involved with the act of bullying in some capacity (as a victim, perpetrator, bystander, etc.). Further, Wheeler et al. (2018) reported that the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System found 20% of high school students experienced bullying in some capacity.

Wimmer (2009) suggests that by researching bullying and attempting to increase our understanding and awareness of bullying, we can identify and develop strategies that can combat bullying early.

Personal Connection

Trigger Warning: This section discusses my personal experience of living through a school shooting. This may be triggering to readers with similar experiences.

In September of 2003, I was an 8th grader at ROCORI Middle School. On September 24th, 2003, I was sitting by my friend in the cafeteria, when she suddenly began complaining of a stomachache. I walked her to the nurse's office, which was located inside a small room attached to the main office. The school secretary was on the phone, and I

overheard some of her conversation. The words “gun” and “shooting” were mentioned. The secretary hung up the phone and immediately picked up the intercom and announced a lockdown. My friend and I hid under a cot in the nurse’s office, and we were terrified. There was panic in the secretary’s voice, and there was an eerie quiet in the air. My friend turned to me and said, “my brother is in trouble”. I asked her how she knew, and she stated that she could “just feel it.” After hiding under the cot for thirty minutes, my friend was called to the main office, and the lockdown was lifted. As she left the nurse’s office, she looked at me and said, “I told you so.” We then separated. I was shuffled out to the parking lot to wait for my father to pick me up. At this time, I still did not know what had happened. My father pulled up, got out of his truck, and gave me a hug. After a long embrace, we drove away from the school. My father had the radio on, and it was then that I learned that two students, Aaron Rollins and Seth Bartell, had been shot at ROCORI High School. One of those students was my friend’s brother. Aaron Rollins lost his life that day, and Seth Bartell lost his life after a ten-day fight in the hospital.

Throughout the trials, it was uncovered that McLaughlin had been severely bullied. He was diagnosed with major depression in remission and an emerging personality disorder (*State of Minnesota v. McLaughlin, 2007*). McLaughlin reported that students had bullied him, and that he needed to end the bullying. McLaughlin was described as isolated, quiet, and egocentric (2007). McLaughlin stated that one of his victims “teased him all the time,” and he wanted to “hurt him” (*State of Minnesota v. McLaughlin,*

2007). Ultimately, McLaughlin ended another person's life to end his perceived bullying victimization.

Bullying seemed to cease to exist throughout my next four years at ROCORI High School. A statue was erected near the front of the school in honor of the victims. The statue seemed to be a constant reminder to the community to love and care for one another.

While the shooting occurred approximately twenty years ago, I can still vividly remember everything about that day. It is my driving factor behind choosing this topic for this project, and it is the driving factor behind my intolerance for bullying. In my perfect world, bullying would cease to exist. While it seems impossible to completely remove, what can be done to reduce it?

Thesis Questions

My experience of witnessing the tragic aftermath of a situation involving bullying has made me passionate about the concept of bullying prevention. The following questions will be the guiding questions behind this thesis report: What types of behaviors constitute as bullying? Are there different types of bullying? Are there subgroups of people who are more likely to experience bullying victimization? Are there long-lasting effects of bullying victimization or bullying perpetration? Lastly, what interventions and/or programs are currently in place to decrease the likelihood of bullying?

Definition of Terms

A brief overview of repeated terms throughout this report is listed here. Other definitions are supplied throughout the remainder of the report.

Bullying: "Any incident that the victim defines as bullying behaviors, whether one-off, or repeated by one or more perpetrators, aimed (intentionally or unintentionally) to hurt or humiliate them physically and/or mentally" (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2018).

Aggression: Hostile and/or violent behaviors done to another individual.

Victim: An individual who has been harmed by a crime, an accident, a disease, or other circumstances.

Perpetrator: An individual who carries out a hurtful act.

Bystander: An individual who is present at an incident but does not take part.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The aim of this study was to identify the effects that bullying, in all of its forms, can have on its victims and provide educators with a literature review synthesizing bullying prevention strategies, interventions, and supports.

In order to identify appropriate pieces of literature that answer the questions posed in this thesis, searches of the following databases: ERIC and ESBCO MegaFILE were conducted throughout December 2019 and May 2020. First, a search was conducted through the ESBCO database using the terms *bullying* and *education*. Articles were chosen if (a) the article was available in full-text, (b) identified school grounds as the setting, and (c) provided a definition of bullying. Initially, this search was deemed to be too broad. The search was narrowed down by using the term *bullying* as the primary term, and including secondary terms such as *prevention, school, effects, study, victimization,* and *special education.* Thirty articles were chosen based upon the following criteria: (a) the article was available in full-text, (b) the abstract identified bullying, effects, or prevention as the main focus of the work, and (c) the summary provided information that attempts to answer the questions posed in this thesis.

The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on bullying in four sections in this order: the different forms and behaviors of bullying, what subgroups of students are more likely to experience bullying victimization, the effects that bullying has on its victims and/or perpetrators, and bullying prevention strategies, interventions, and supports that are in place.

Forms of Bullying

Before discussing the different forms of bullying as well as the content the next section contains, it is helpful to understand that bullying includes three potential participants. According to Rose et al. (2010), the three potential participants include: 1) the bully, 2) the victim, and 3) the bystander. Each participant plays a role by "engaging in, experiencing, or reinforcing the aggressive behavior" (Rose et al., 2010). The bully is defined as the individual who executes actions that create physical or emotional power over the victim. The victim definition has been split into two categories: the passive victim and the proactive victim (Rose et al., 2010). Rose et al. (2010) reports that 80 percent to 85 percent of the victimized population falls into the passive victim category. Typically, the passive victim does not act against the bully and is characterized as "being physically weaker, having fewer friends, demonstrating lower self-esteem, being rejected by peers, being dependent on others, having observable differences, or possessing weaker social skills" (Rose et al., 2010, p. 119). Alternatively, the proactive victim inherits bullying tendencies and characteristics as a result of their victimization. These behaviors may be executed on the proactive victim's bully, however, these behaviors may also be executed on friends or acquaintances of the proactive victim.

Salamn Almahasnih (2019) indicated that bullying is considered to be a phenomenon and is more than just an educational problem, as it is also a social and personal problem. Bullying has a negative psychological and negative physical impact on its victims (Cabrera et al., 2019). In order to understand what forms of behavior constitute as

bullying, we must first come to a mutual agreement on the definition of the term *bullying.* Espelage and Swearer (2003) have concluded that the act of bullying involves the notion that "bullying includes both physical and verbal aggression, which is a systematic, ongoing set of behavior instigated by an individual or group of individuals who are attempting to gain power, prestige, or goods" (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, pg. 368). However, Ronksley-Pavia et al. (2018) understand bullying as "any incident that the victim defines as bullying behaviors; whether one-off, or repeated by one or more perpetrators, aimed (intentionally or unintentionally) to hurt or humiliate them physically and/or mentally" (p. 19). Espelage and Swearer (2003) created what could be a universal understanding of the acts that constitute bullying behaviors. Ronksley-Pavia et al. (2018) leave the acts that constitute as bullying behaviors up to the victim. For congruency purposes, the acts provided by Espelage and Swearer (2003) will be focused on throughout the remainder of this thesis. These acts of bullying can be presented in a variety of different forms.

It should also be noted that Rose et al. (2010) also highlighted that there are acts of aggression that are *not* defined as bullying. Those acts of aggression include: instrumental, retaliatory, and jostling whereas. Instrumental aggression refers to a stance taken by a victim or a bystander that includes the defense of property, reputation, or the well-being of the victim. Retaliatory aggression refers to an often impulsive physical altercation and is displayed on impulse (Rose et al., 2010). Lastly, jostling refers to a "rough-housing" style of play that is thought of as mutually enjoyable.

Cyberbullying

The first form of bullying that is perhaps perceived to be the more prominent form of bullying in today's society is: cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as using one or more forms of technology to share "aggressive messages" across social media platforms (Wheeler et al., 2018). It could be argued that cyberbullying is no longer a form of bullying, but is its own phenomenon due to its specific features (Zych et al., 2015). According to the 2017 School Crime Supplement (a national sample survey of public or private school students ages 12 through 18), 3 percent of students reported being bullied electronically (on social media or through text messaging) (Yanez et al., 2019). Furthermore, the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System found that 16% of high school students reported being bullied electronically (Wheeler et al., 2018). The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System is a system of surveys that includes a national school-based survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and local surveys conducted by either state, territorial, or local education agencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023). Zych et al. (2015) suggest that the prevalence of cyberbullying may increase with age. Further, Zych et al. (2015) notes that rates of cyber-victimization appear to be higher among females, and rates of cyber-perpetration appear to be higher amongst males.

Results of the 2017 School Crime Supplement survey concluded that 63 percent of students who reported being bullied electronically reported experiencing negative effects in at least one of the following areas: on their school work, relationships with family or friends, their self-confidence, or their physical health (Yanez et al., 2019). Con-

versely, 37 percent of students who reported being bullied in person reported experiencing negative effects in the same areas (Yanez et al., 2019). Further, students who reported being bullied electronically also reported higher rates of avoiding school or areas within the school, or staying home altogether than students who reported being bullied in person. This information suggests that students who are victims of cyberbullying experience a higher rate of negative impacts than students who are victims of in-person bullying. Interestingly, the 2017 School Crime Supplement survey found that 56 percent of students who reported being bullied electronically told an adult about the bullying, whereas 45 percent of students who reported being bullied in person told an adult about the bullying (Yanez et al., 2019).

The following forms of bullying will focus primarily on bullying that occurs on school property, whether that be within the classroom, at recess, in the cafeteria, or during before/after school activities.

In Person Bullying

Rose et al. (2010) listed the four distinct categories of bullying perpetration identified by the United States Department of Education as: 1) physical, 2) verbal, 3) indirect (relational, emotional, social), and 4) sexual.

Physical bullying can range from hitting, kicking, or shoving to fighting. Physical bullying can also include damage to property (Rose et al., 2010). Rose et al. (2010) suggest that younger-aged students who have not yet developed their verbal or social skills typically engage in physical aggression.

Verbal bullying can range from intimidation and mimicking to racial remarks and abusive language. Verbal bullying also includes threats of violence.

Indirect bullying involves lies, rumors, or isolation initiated by the perpetrator with the intent to damage the victim's peer relations.

Sexual bullying is commonly referred to as sexual harassment and involves sexually explicit language and sexually abusive actions. Rose et al. (2010) note that a majority of reported and studied bullying includes indirect bullying and sexual bullying.

Bullying Victimization – Who is at Risk?

This section will focus on different subgroups that are at higher risk for experiencing bullying victimization. This section will focus primarily on students who receive special education services, however, it will briefly provide information on the following subgroups of students: gender (particularly female), sexual preference, and income.

Thwala et al. (2018) conducted a study in order to determine why females are reported to experience bullying victimization at a higher rate than males. They formulated a group of twenty-four females from three different schools between ages 13 and 19, who had experienced bullying (Thwala et al., (2018). The twenty-four females participated in a focus group discussion in order to discuss any possible characteristics that make females more susceptible to bullying. Focus group discussions lasted anywhere between 45 and 60 minutes and took place after school (Thwala et al., (2018). Thwala et al. (2018) found that the participants indicated a low sense of self-esteem and feelings of loneliness. Female students that possess these characteristics could be at a higher risk for bullying victimization.

It has been found that sexual orientation can also play a role in what students are more likely to experience bullying victimization. Garaigordobil and Larrain (2020) conducted a study to analyze differences in sexual orientation and the percentage of victims that experience in-person bullying and/or cyberbullying. Garaigordobil and Larrain (2020) found a population sample consisting of 1,748 students between the ages of 13 and 17. Of this population sample, 12.5% were non-heterosexuals and 87.5% were heterosexuals. Garaigordobil and Larrain (2020) then administered four assessments to each participant. They found that the percentage of victims who experienced in-person bullying and cyberbullying was "significantly higher" amongst the non-heterosexuals (Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020). Garaigordobil and Larrain (2020) also found that non-heterosexual victims who experienced in-person bullying and cyberbullying experienced more aggressive bullying as well as higher rates of depression, social anxiety, and psychopathological symptoms (Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020).

D'Augelli et al. (2002) also conducted a study to analyze rates of bullying victimization amongst students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. D'Augelli et al. (2002) reached out to twenty-eight social and recreational groups for adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and asked for willing participants. 350 students agreed to participate, and the group makeup consisted of 56% males and 44% females (D'Augelli et al., 2002). Of the males, 83% identified as gay and of the females, 64% identified as lesbian. D'Augelli et al. (2002) then administered a questionnaire seeking information regarding sexual orientation, social aspects of their sexual orientation, mental health

symptoms, and bullying victimization experiences related to sexual orientation. D'Augelli et al. (2002) found that gay and bisexual males experienced a higher rate of victimization than lesbian and bisexual females. Further, D'Augelli et al. (2002) found that 59% of the participants experienced verbal abuse throughout high school, 24% were threatened with physical violence, 11% reported objects being thrown at them, 2% were threatened with weapons, 5% were sexually assaulted, and 20% were threatened with disclosure regarding their sexual orientation. Their findings were consistent with the findings of Garaigordobil and Larrain (2020), suggesting that sexual orientation can heighten the risk of bullying victimization.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the only subgroups of students that are at higher risk for experiencing bullying victimization. Hong et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine if welfare assistance is associated with higher rates of bullying victimization. Hong et al. (2020) found a sample group of 15,010 caregivers of children between the ages of 6 and 11 who were receiving welfare assistance. Hong et al. (2020) utilized the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) to gather data, and results from the NSCH were analyzed. Data collected from the NSCH determined if the caregiver's child reported being "picked on" as well as what form of welfare assistance the caregiver was receiving. Hong et al. (2020) found that mothers who reported receiving welfare assistance had higher rates of reporting that their children were victimized by their peers. Further, Hong et al. (2020) examined what types of welfare assistance were more likely to result in bullying victimization and found that mothers who receive Medicaid and free/reduced breakfasts and lunches were at an increased risk of bullying

victimization. This study highlights another subgroup of students who could be at risk for bullying victimization.

The remainder of this section will focus on students who receive special education services. Saia et al. (2009) reported that research suggests students who receive special education services are at a higher risk for bullying victimization. They conducted a study to further this research, and found a sample of students from four different schools. The sample of students was selected after obtaining parental consent, determining if the students were able and willing to participate, and were attending 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, or 8th grade (Saia et al., 2009). It was also determined if the participants were receiving general education services or special education services. Using this information, Saia et al. (2009) selected a group of 271 students, comprised of 229 students receiving general education services and 42 students receiving the following special education services: 20 resource and 22 self-contained (center-based). The students then participated in 15-20 minute interviews that focused on questions that measured bullying behavior and bullying victimization experiences as well as perceptions of school violence and safety (Saia et al., 2009). Saia et al. (2009) found that 40% of students receiving special education classes in the resource setting and 50% of students receiving special education classes in the self-contained setting reported significant levels of victimization (as compared to 17% of students receiving general education services). Saia et al. (2009) focused on special education services, and further research has been done to determine if there are students with certain disabilities that are victimized at an even higher rate.

Rodriguez et al. (2020) focused on students who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For their study, they reached out to mothers following a recruitment process. The recruitment process focused on school and childcare mailings as well as fliers posted in clinics that service individuals with Autism (Rodriguez et al., 2020). They created a list of criteria stating the child must be between 5 and 12 years old with a medical or educational diagnosis of Autism. The study was then conducted over one year, and they included two points of data collection; one at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study (Rodriguez et al., 2020). One hundred eighty-seven mothers chose to participate for the first point of data collection and of the participants, 84% were Caucasian, 86% were male, and their average age was 7.90 years (Rodriguez et al., 2020). By the second point of data collection, 26 of the mothers chose not to participate. However, the families who left did not have a significant impact on the overall makeup of the participant group. At each point of data collection, the mothers reported on their child's bullying victimization as well as the behaviors the child was demonstrating as a result of their Autism diagnosis (Rodriguez et al., 2020). The mothers also identified a teacher that worked closely with their child, and the teacher was contacted to provide further insight into the child's bullying victimization and mental health battles. Rodriguez et al. (2020) found that 38.5% of mothers reported at the first point of data collection that their child had been bullied, and 41.3% of mothers reported at the second point of data collection that their child had been bullied. Rodriguez et al. (2020) also found that the youth involved in this study who had a higher severity of Autism symptoms also had a higher frequency of bullying victimization than youth with a

lower severity of Autism symptoms. This study suggests that students with Autism are at a higher risk of experiencing bullying victimization throughout their educational career.

Matthias et al. (2021) also focused on youth with an Autism diagnosis. They utilized the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012) as it provides information about students who receive special education services during the transitional phase from high school to adulthood. Matthias et al. (2021) then created a sample of 1,000 students who had a diagnosis of Autism and were between the ages of 11 and 22. Among these 1,000 identified students, 86.1% reported they had experienced bullying victimization (Matthias et al., 2021). Types of victimization reported in this study include physical abuse, verbal abuse, threats of violence (both in-person and online), or victims of theft. Their data represents even higher numbers than that of Rodriguez et al. (2020) and again suggests that students with Autism are at a higher risk of bullying victimization throughout both their educational career and their transitional period.

Bitsika et al. (2020) conducted a study to further examine the rates at which youth with Autism experience bullying victimization. Bitsika et al. (2020) recruited parents who belonged to an Autism Spectrum Disorder parent organization via email. Bitsika et al. (2020) then selected their participants based on the following criteria: the youth was diagnosed with Autism, attending a mainstream educational setting, had an IQ of at least 70, and was male. In total, a group of 67 youth met the criteria and their mothers completed a questionnaire consisting of three parts: 1) their son's challenges in socializing/communicating and behaviors, 2) bullying victimization their son's may or

may not have experienced, and 3) standardized scales that measured anxiety and depression (Bitsika et al., (2020).

Effects of Bullying

Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

Perhaps the greatest and most common effect of bullying is the compromising effects on the right to learning and the feeling of safety within schools (Sikhakhane et al., 2018). Individuals who are victims of bullying can experience confusion, helplessness, and insecurity. Some victims have also reported mental health problems, depression, an increase in anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. Perpetrators can also experience effects that have impacts on both their academic achievement and mental health.

McClemont et al. (2020) conducted a study involving students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). As identified in the last section, students who receive special education services are at a higher risk of experiencing bullying victimization. Participants in the study conducted by McClemont et al. (2020) consisted of 97 parents of 154 students ages 4-16. Students were then placed in groups based off their parent-reported diagnoses. Thirty-six students were diagnosed with ASD, 16 students were diagnosed with ADHD, 31 students were diagnosed with ASD and ADHD, 15 students had a different diagnosis (anxiety disorder, mood disorder, learning disorder, language disorder, sensory disorder), and 56 students had no diagnosis (McClemont et al., 2020). McClemont et al. (2020) administered a study online to the parents of these students, and parents answered questions using a Likert Scale to answer questions regarding bullying, their child's diagnosis, their

child's social understanding, and their child's classroom type. The main focus for McClemont et al. (2020) was to identify if there was a correlation between school refusal and bullying in children with ASD and ADHD. Data was then analyzed based on parent responses, and McClemont et al. (2020) found that 68% of children with ASD and ADHD had refused to go to school due to bullying, 28% of children with ASD had refused to go to school due to bullying, and 18% of children with no diagnosis had refused to go to school due to bullying. This study can provide insight into chronic absenteeism amongst students, and why some students have a hard time coming to school.

Yang et al. (2018) conducted a study with the intent to identify an association between bullying victimization and student engagement. The Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project and the Delaware Department of Education worked together to invite all public schools in Delaware, and 114 schools voluntarily consented to participate in the Delaware School Survey (Yang et al., 2018). From there, they founded a sample consisting of 25,896 students attending grades 4-12 from those 114 different public schools across the state of Delaware. The survey administered consisted of ten items that used Likert scales to measure responses (Yang et al., 2018). These items assessed the participants' perceptions of being involved or invested in both the emotional and cognitive aspects of their schooling. The survey also consisted of twenty-two items that used Likert scales to measure responses regarding the school climate. Yang et al. (2018) found that particularly amongst middle schoolers, students reported less emotional engagement within the school setting when they experienced a higher frequency of bullying. Yang et al. (2018) also reported that the findings of their study suggested that

school climate is indicative of the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement among students.

Emotional engagement amongst students who experienced bullying was also studied by Gomes et al. (2020). Gomes et al. (2020) conducted a study that consisted of 288 students who were enrolled in a first, second, third, or fourth-grade classroom. Of the 288 students, 51% were females and 49% were males (Gomes et al., 2020). Students were asked to fill out a questionnaire on bullying while their teacher(s) were asked to report on behaviors within the classroom as well as classroom achievement. After comparing data derived from the student's questionnaires and the teacher reports, Gomes et al. (2020) found that there was little to no correlation between bullying victimization and aggression. However, Gomes et al. (2020) reported that students who reported bullying victimization experienced an increase in motor activity within the classroom, which can have an impact on concentration and participation. Further, Gomes et al. (2020) found that students who reported bullying perpetration experienced an increase in "opposition behavior, excessive motor activity, and hyperactivity" (p. 259). These classroom behaviors, for both the victim and the perpetrator, can impact the learning environment and have negative impacts on academic achievement.

Standardized testing is said to be indicative of academic achievement. While the aforementioned studies focused on self-reported incidences of bullying and academic achievement/absenteeism, Lacey et al. (2016) took a different approach to collecting and reviewing data. Lacey et al. (2016) created a sample comprised of 271 secondary

schools in the state of Virginia, grades six through eight. Each school was given two options, 1) include all seventh- and eighth-graders in the survey process, or 2) select at least 25 seventh- and 25 eight-graders. As a result, Lacey et al. (2016) were able to obtain a sample of 29,203 students in either seventh- or eighth grade. Additionally, 9,099 seventh- or eighth-grade teachers participated in the study. Student participants completed a survey involving the following scales: 1) prevalence of teasing and bullying (administered to determine the frequency in which bullying occurs), 2) student engagement (administered to determine the cognitive and affective engagement in school), 3) bullying victimization (administered to determine the level of personal experiences with bulling victimization, and 4) academic achievement (administered to determine the percentage of students who received passing rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning exams) (Lacey et al., 2016). Teacher participants completed the prevalence of teasing and bullying scale. Lacey et al. (2016) then created models for data analysis and comparison through the use of Analysis of Moment Structures 18.0 (AMOS) statistical software. Lacey et al. (2016) found that student perceptions of bullying were "significantly" associated with the participants' student engagement and lower pass rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning exams. More specifically, seventh- and eighth-grade reports of victimization were "found to be significantly negatively correlated" with Grade 7 English passing scores (Lacey et al., 2016, p. 206). This study further reiterates the negative impact bullying victimization can have on student engagement and academic achievement.

A recurring theme throughout this section is the idea that bullying perpetration and victimization can have an effect on student engagement, and student engagement

can have an effect on academic achievement. Lacoe (2016) explored the idea that learning in a safe environment can be critical for student engagement and academic achievement. Lacoe (2016) conducted a study that consisted of 340,000 students (across more than 700 secondary schools) throughout their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade academic years. The students were surveyed each of their three years while attending secondary school to determine if feeling unsafe in the classroom had a correlation to negative test scores. Lacoe (2016) focused the survey on whether or not the participants felt safe in their classroom (and surrounding areas, including hallways, bathrooms, cafeterias, etc.) and if the participants ever stayed home from school due to feeling unsafe at school. As a result, Lacoe (2016) found that fifteen percent of the participants reported feeling unsafe in the classroom. These participants had a higher average of absences and lower average of scores on their standardized tests. While this study focused more on the perception of safety within a school as opposed to direct bullying, the results reiterate the negative impact bullying and feeling unsafe can have on academic achievement.

The aforementioned studies focused primarily on bullying victimization and its effects on student engagement and academic achievement. Woods and Wolke (2004) also conducted a study in an attempt to determine if bullying perpetration has a negative effect on academic achievement. Woods and Wolke (2004) gathered a sample of students in 82 classes between 39 elementary schools in the United Kingdom. Students within these participating classes were interviewed utilizing a standard interview focusing on friendships and peer relationships. Students first answered questions related to

their own experiences. According to Woods and Wolke (2004), students were asked if they had experienced the following situations: 1) having been called a bad name, 2) having personal items taken, 3) having lies told about them, 4) being played a trick on, 5) having been threatened, and 6) having been physically assaulted. If the students reported having experienced any of those situations, they were asked to provide further details. Following the conclusion of those six questions, students were then asked if *they* had ever put another student in any of those situations. Woods and Wolke (2004) referred to this type of bullying behavior as direct bullying. Woods and Wolke (2004) also collected data in regard to relational bullying by asking students if they had experienced the following situations: 1) being told no one wants to play with them, 2) being told they're no longer friends, 3) having untrue rumors spread about them, and 4) having games be deliberately ruined. Again, following the conclusion of those four questions, students were asked if *they* had ever put another student in any of those situations. In regard to academic achievement for this study, Woods and Wolke (2004) focused on standardized test scores. In the United Kingdom, elementary grade students complete a Key State 1 National Curriculum Assessment (SATs 1) at the end of the school year (Woods & Wolke, 2004). In the United States, this assessment is equivalent to our individual state's standardized testing. Data containing results from the testing was then compared to data obtained from the student interviews. Results from this study showed no correlation between direct bullying and academic achievement. However, Woods and Wolke (2004) found that students that demonstrated relational bullying behaviors

scored significantly higher on the SATs. Woods and Wolke (2004) also found that students who experienced relational bullying victimization were three times more likely to have underachieved on the SAT's. This piece of information is congruent with information retrieved from the previous studies mentioned in this report.

Long-Term Effects

Academic achievement can have long-term effects on students who underperform. Post-secondary and vocational options can be limited and dependent upon academics. However, poor academic achievement is not the only outcome that can have long-term effects on victims of bullying. Stress, motivation (both personal and academic), and overall quality of life can all be impacted by experiencing bullying throughout the primary and secondary school years.

To begin with a broader sense of what long-term effects bullying can have on its victims, a study completed by Pörhölä et al. (2019) will be mentioned first. Pörhölä et al. (2019) conducted a study that was completed for a myriad of reasons. Information regarding physical, mental and social health, health behavior, study ability, and experiences of bullying was collected from a total of 5,086 undergraduate university students with Finnish citizenship studying at academic universities across Finland. Of these students, 36.6% were reported as male, and 63.4% were reported as female. Additionally, 45.9% studied at Universities of Applied Science (Pörhölä et al., 2019). A stratified random sampling method was then used to identify 9,967 students from the overall study population. For the purpose of this report, only data collected regarding bullying and victimization will be presented. Experiences of bullying and victimization and school

were assessed by administering items to participants using Likert scales. Pörhölä et al. (2019) assessed questions such as: 1) “How much were you bullied when you were at school?”, 2) What was the frequency in which the bullying occurred?”, and 3) What was the degree to which you bullied other students, in comparison to your classmates?”. The information gathered from these three prompts then allowed Pörhölä et al. (2019) to classify the participants into subgroups titled “*victims*”, “*bullies,”* “*no experience*”, and “*inconsistent*.” *Victims* accounted for 9.8% of the participants, and *bullies* accounted for 2.2% of the participants. Other items were administered to the participants in order to determine the level of anxiety (if any) that the participants experience and/or experienced. Pörhölä et al. (2019) found that a result of the study indicated that “university learning situations cause the highest levels of anxiety to former and current victims of peer bullying” (p. 736). This study provides insight on the effects that bullying has on students long-term.

More specifically, Adams and Lawrence (2011) were curious as to whether or not victims of bullying continued to demonstrate effects of their victimization while enrolled in post-secondary education. Adams and Lawrence (2011) gathered 269 undergraduate students (freshmen through seniors) from a Midwestern state college. Of the participants, who volunteered to participate in the study, 176 were female, and 93 were male. Participants filled out questionnaires containing a Likert Scale to rate items (strongly agree, strongly disagree, etc.). Of the 269 participants, 100 reported they had been bullied in secondary school (Adams & Lawrence, 2011). Adams and Lawrence (2011) placed these 100 participants in a “bullied group” and closely examined other answers on their

questionnaires. Data retrieved from the questionnaires suggested that students who have experienced bullying throughout their secondary education continued to experience victimization while in college. Adams and Lawrence (2011) theorized that this could be due to victimized students reporting it difficult to make friends while in college or due to victimized students not knowing how to handle the bullying behavior.

Whether or not victims continue to experience bullying victimization in college, stress can continue to be felt by the victims at any educational level. Newman et al. (2005) managed a study that focused on victims of bullying before and during high school and the prolonged effects that followed them to their post-secondary education. In order to conduct this study, Newman et al. (2005) created a sample size that consisted of 853 undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. Participants were asked eight questions that focused on their personal experiences with bullying as well as their reactions to the bullying itself. Newman et al. (2005) then identified the frequency with which the participants reported victimization as well as the relationship between the frequency and symptoms of stress. Newman et al. (2005) found that throughout their primary education years, 33% of the participants reported being bullied “occasionally,” while 26% of the participants reported being bullied “frequently.” Further, Newman et al. (2005) found that throughout their secondary education years, 25% of the participants reported being bullied “occasionally,” and 9% of the participants reported being bullied “frequently”. Concluding the study, Newman et al. (2005) was able to find a correlation between frequency of victimization during the participants primary and secondary educational years and the reported stress symptoms

experienced in college. Specifically, participants who reported frequent bullying victimization throughout their secondary education also reported more stress symptoms in college, while participants who reported frequent bullying victimization throughout their primary education reported less stress symptoms in college (Newman et al., 2005).

In addition to stress levels, academic motivation can also be impacted by experiencing bullying throughout the primary and secondary school years. Young-Jones et al. (2014) conducted a study of 130 participants from a Midwestern university. The participants completed numerous surveys online that focused on perceptions of bullying, perceptions of stress, academic motivation, and perceptions of social support (Young-Jones et al., 2014). Young-Jones et al. (2014) composed their results as a result of these questionnaires and found that 73.8% of participants reported bullying victimization in some format. Young-Jones et al. (2014) then compared academic motivation scores for participants who reported bullying victimization and participants who did not report bullying victimization. Participants who reported experiencing verbal and/or physical bullying were reported to have "significantly lower academic motivation" than the participants who did not report experiencing verbal and/or physical bullying (Young-Jones et al., 2014, p. 196). This study, like the aforementioned studies that focused on academic achievement, shows that bullying can have a long-lasting impact on academics.

Bullying can affect stress levels and academic motivation well in to victim's college years, proving that there are other long-lasting effects of bullying victimization than just academic achievement. Schäfer et al. (2004) produced a study that concentrated on functioning in adult life as a whole. Schäfer et al. (2004) created a sample of 884 adults,

who are either teachers or students, from Spain, Germany, and the UK. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants and collected by the research team. Schäfer et al. (2004) identified which participants constituted victims based on the participants' reports of physical, verbal, and/or indirect bullying. Schäfer et al. (2004) then broke the victims down into separate groups: 1) primary school victims (96 total participants), 2) secondary school victims (81 total participants), and 3) "stable victims" (victims who were bullied in both primary and secondary school for a total of 70 participants). The sample then was then compared to a section of the questionnaire that focused on measures of current social-life quality. Schäfer et al. (2004) found that 22% of former victims idealized suicide at least once, and 13% idealized suicide more than once. While this may or may not directly interfere with the quality of life, these percentages should be taken into consideration due to the serious nature. Results of the study suggested that participants who were bullied in school experienced a negative perception of themselves and others as they became adults. Further, Schäfer et al. (2004) noted that secondary school victims and stable victims reported a higher "fearful" profile, indicating a level of discomfort when meeting new people and forming new relationships. Most notably, participants who reported victimization (at any level) experienced difficulties in maintaining higher self-esteem (Schäfer et al., 2004). These factors can alter the general quality of life for victims of bullying, at any stage throughout their academic careers.

Kim et al. (2020) took a different approach to conducting their study than the others listed previously. In order to conduct this study, a dataset was taken from the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 2015. Kim et al. (2020) created a sample size of 13,110 participants based on the amount of usable questionnaires (questionnaires were excluded during the process if they failed quality control, due to responses from participants that included "not applicable"). The 13,110 participants spanned 180 United States secondary education schools, grades 9-12. The sample size consisted of 51% female participants and 49% male participants (Kim et al., 2020). In total, it was reported that 22% of female participants and 16% of male participants reported they had experienced some form of bullying victimization at school (Kim et al., 2020). The effects of victimization was broken down into two parts: direct effects and indirect effects. For this thesis, direct effects will be the focus. Kim et al. (2020) found that experiencing bullying victimization at school was directly associated with depression in both females and males. Further, depression was reported to be adversely correlated with academic performance. While this study highlights the significance of bullying and how it affects mental health, depression is not the only mental health symptom that can be affected.

Mental Health

Oblath et al. (2019) conducted a study that consisted of 470 first-year post-secondary students at four separate universities. Similar to other studies, the participants completed an online questionnaire that focused on their experiences with bullying victimization and symptoms of anxiety and depression. After analyzing the responses, Oblath et al. (2019) found that participants who reported being a victim of bullying, at any

stage throughout their academic career, indicated higher rates of anxiety and depression symptoms in comparison to participants who did not report being a victim of bullying.

To solidify the notion that experiencing bullying victimization can impact the victim's mental health, Manrique et al. (2019) gathered a sample of 270 participants who were undergraduates in the northeastern United States. Self-report measures were given to each participants, and the responses were analyzed. Manrique et al. (2019) specifically sought information regarding bullying victimization in secondary school and whether or not it was a catalyst for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms throughout post-secondary education. As a result, Manrique et al. (2019) found that participants who reported experiencing bullying victimization also reported higher rates of PTSD symptoms. Interestingly, Manrique et al. (2019) also found that participants who had perceived social support throughout the time of their victimization and throughout their post-secondary education were able to reduce their symptoms of PTSD, suggesting that support from a parent, peer, colleague, or friend was beneficial for reducing symptoms.

This section examined the possible effects that experiencing bullying victimization can have on an individual. Effects such as chronic absenteeism, poor academic achievement, poor academic motivation, symptoms of depression, symptoms of anxiety, and symptoms of PTSD were all emphasized. It was briefly mentioned that peer support helped to reduce some symptoms of PTSD alone, suggesting that there are possibil-

ities in assisting victims with the effects of bullying victimization. However, are there interventions and/or programs in place that can decrease the likelihood of bullying from the start? The next section includes studies containing programs that have been implemented and their effectiveness.

Bullying Prevention Strategies/Programs

In order to portray the importance of implementing bullying prevention strategies or bullying prevention programs, a study completed by Yeager et al. (2011) will be incorporated into this project. Yeager et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine if certain subgroups of people (such as bullies and victims, winners and losers) can change and remove themselves from the bullying situation and/or cycle. The study was also conducted to determine if adolescents who were identified to hold an entity theory (the belief that a personal trait cannot be changed) were more likely to seek vengeance after a conflict. They composed a subsample of 219 Finnish adolescents attending grades 9 and 10 (ages ranging from 14 years to 16 years). Of the Finnish subsample group participants, 47% were reported to be females and 95% were reported to be Caucasian. Six schools in Finland were sampled from various regions, and were invited to participate in the study. Yeager et al. (2011) also composed a subsample of 138 adolescents living in the United States attending grades 9 and 10 (ages ranging from 14 years to 16 years). Of the United States subsample, 58% were reported to be females and the grouping was noted to be more diverse than the Finnish subsample. 21% were Black/African American, 36% were Asian or Asian American, 35% were Hispanic/Latino, 4% were Caucasian,

and 4% indicated another race/ethnicity (Yeager et al., 2011). While the Finnish subgroup was composed of six schools, the United States subgroup was composed of one low-income Charter school in Oakland, California. Yeager et al. (2011) reported that consent was gained from 78% of students in grades 9 and 10 at the Charter school. They then administered six items to the consenting participants measuring an entity theory about bullies and victims, and the items were written specifically for the study. They also administered items that measured the desire for vengeance following a recollected conflict as well as items that measured feeling towards both the self and the other individual involved. Yeager et al. (2011) found that for students who hold an entity theory can feel hatred toward their aggressor and seek out revenge. This finding can help to explain some of the school shootings that the United States of America is experiencing at a seemingly high rate. Additionally, this finding can highlight the importance of implementing bullying prevention strategies and/or programs within schools in hopes of preventing further violence.

Another study that highlights the importance of implementing bullying prevention strategies and/or programs was conducted by Cabrera et al. (2020). Cabrera et al. (2020) included five secondary schools in their study, collecting a total of 1,029 participants. A questionnaire was distributed to the participants in order to gather information on their reactions or involvement in bullying situations within their school. It is important to note the different types of reactions to bullying. Cabrera et al. (2020) listed the following reactions and levels of involvement as 1) active behavior (encouraging the bully to continue with the behaviors either verbally or physically), 2) passive behavior

(staying out of the way or being a bystander), and 3) proactive behavior (defending the victims or seeking help from a peer or adult). After receiving the completed questionnaires, Cabrera et al. (2020) utilized a Chi-squared test to analyze the results. Cabrera et al. (2020) found that 14.6% of participants reported active behavior, 11.1% of participants reported passive behavior, and 74.3% of participants reported proactive behavior. Bullying prevention strategies and/or programs could not only decrease the bullying behavior from happening in the first place, but it could also help to ensure the percentage of students who participate in active behavior decreases.

Connolly et al. (2014) conducted a study in an attempt to determine whether or not youth-led programs could diminish the occurrences of bullying and peer aggression. These youth-led programs could be considered an example of proactive behavior, as students are leading the activities. In order to complete this study, Connolly et al. (2014) involved 12 secondary schools in Canada that had similar enrollment numbers for a total sample of 509 secondary education students. At the beginning of the school year, participants completed a survey. Throughout the school year, participants completed either a youth-led anti-bullying program or the board-mandated usual practice. In total, 209 participants completed the youth-led anti-bullying program, and 300 participants completed the board-mandated usual practice. The youth-led program (specifically the program Respect in Schools Everywhere; RISE) was implemented by leaders in the eleventh- and twelfth grades. Presentations, workshops, and afterschool sessions that focused on understanding peer aggression and prevention were key components in the youth-led program. The board-mandated usual practice program was implemented by local police,

internal staff, and external contractors. Classroom lectures or assemblies that focused on anti-bullying discussions and peer aggression were key components in the board-mandated usual practice program. Following the completion of the programs, participants were again asked to complete a survey. The survey responses were then compared in an effort to determine which program had greater success. While the surveys completed at the beginning of the academic year indicated low rates of bullying victimization, Connolly et al. (2014) were still able to conclude that participants involved in the youth-led program showed "significant reductions in anxiety and maintained their school connectedness" (p. 403). This conclusion indicates that youth-led programs could have success in bullying prevention.

Student-led programs are not the only programs that have been studied and proven to have success. Mariani et al. (2015) researched the effectiveness of a school-counselor-led program, and studied a sample size of 336 fifth-grade students across five different schools from a school district in Florida. Each participating school had its own certified school counselor. A pre-test was administered to the participants before implementation of the program. The school counselor was then responsible for delivering weekly forty-five-minute social skills lessons for a total of five weeks. Following completion of the lessons, the participants were issued a post-test. In order to create a control group, fifth graders who did not participate in the lessons were also given a pre-and post-test. Results from the tests from each group were then compared. Mariani et al.

(2015) found that participants who received the social skills lessons reported more pro-social behaviors than the students who did not receive the social-skills lessons, implying these types of lessons/programs can help to diminish peer aggression and bullying.

Youth-led programs and counselor-led programs have proven to be successful in diminishing bullying behavior and increasing the likelihood of students demonstrating proactive behaviors. The following studies will focus on specific frameworks and interventions that have been implemented and whether or not they were perceived to be successful following implementation.

One framework that was researched by Gage et al. (2018) that when implemented can help to prevent bullying behaviors is referred to as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS). In order to conduct this study, Gage et al. (2018) created a sample of 128,419 third- to fifth-grade students in Georgia. The participants were then involved in a climate where SWPBIS was implemented with fidelity for a one academic year. The SWPBIS framework focused on identifying students needing behavioral support and implementing interventions designed to create a safe environment for all learners by holding all students to the same level of expectations. Utilizing an annual school climate survey completed by the participants, Gage et al. (2018) found that the implementation of the SWPBIS framework had positive effects on the number of discipline referrals and the amount of suspensions. Because the SWPBIS framework focuses on prosocial behaviors, Gage et al. (2018) noted that implementing a true bullying program alongside the SWPBIS framework would be beneficial. The results of this

study show that when positive behavior frameworks are implemented with fidelity, they can help to decrease negative behaviors within the school setting.

While not a true anti-bullying program, Letendre et al. (2016) conducted research on an intervention that gave students the means to voice their concerns. Letendre et al. (2016) involved teachers, support staff, and administration in a primary education setting as their focus. Participants of this study were divided into five groups: two teacher groups, two support staff groups, and one administration group. In total, there were 21 participants. The participants in each group were trained by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program to help students understand how to stop bullying behaviors. Specifically, an intervention referred to as the "Stop, Walk, and Talk" was implemented throughout this study (Letendre et al., 2016). The purpose of the intervention is to teach students to 1) use their words to talk through a problem, 2) walk away if the problem persists, and 3) confide in an adult or staff member if the problem does not get resolved. Each step of the Stop, Walk, and Talk intervention was modeled and practiced throughout the duration of the school day by the participating members. Following the conclusion of the intervention (in which the duration was one academic year), the participants were interviewed in their respective groups in order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. The information provided in the interviews led Letendre et al. (2016) to conclude that the universal language provided in the Stop, Walk, and Talk intervention was beneficial for both staff and students in combating bullying behaviors. Throughout the interviews, it was noted that a teacher made the following statement: "One time I did hear one of them [say] 'I'm gonna go tell the

teacher' and 'no, you have to use Stop first'" (Letendre et al., 2016, p. 240). The Stop, Walk, and Talk intervention helps to provide both staff and students with common verbiage that can help students, particularly primary education students, talk through their problems before it gets to the stage of bullying.

In the United Kingdom, research on another intervention was researched to evaluate its effectiveness. The intervention, referred to as "KiVa" (which is an acronym for a saying that can translate to "against bullying"), aims to help students change bystander behavior (previously referred to as passive behavior) in order to decrease the frequency and duration of bullying situations at school (Clarkson et al., 2022). Garandeau et al. (2021) created a sample of 15,403 students from 140 different schools. Garandeau et al. (2021) noted that there were 399 control classrooms (classrooms that implemented usual practice or "UP"), and 462 intervention classrooms (classrooms that implemented KiVa). Students were administered a pretest at the beginning of the academic year and a posttest at the end of the academic year. Results from the pretest and posttest showed that KiVa positively affected students' ability to demonstrate empathy. This empathy can help students who demonstrate passive behavior to react to bullying occurrences rather than be a bystander.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

There are three core questions that were examined throughout the literature. The core questions are as follows:

1. Are there subgroups of students that are more likely to experience bullying victimization?
2. What effects does bullying have on its victims and/or perpetrators?
3. What interventions and/or programs are in place to decrease the likelihood of bullying?

Research studies presented in this literature have been congruent with the ideology that there are certain subgroups of students who are more likely to experience bullying victimization. Subgroups of students who are more likely to experience bullying include: females (Thwala et al., 2018), non-heterosexuals (Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020), male non-heterosexuals (D'Augelli et al., 2002), and welfare assistance recipients; specifically Medicaid and free and reduced lunched programs (Hong et al., 2020). Within the area of special education, students in self-contained settings (Saia et al., 2009), and students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (Bitsika et al., 2020; Matthias et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020) are more likely to be victims of bullying.

The act of bullying has numerous effects on its victims. There are adverse effects within the school setting, negative long-term effects, and negative effects on mental health. Within the school setting, victims can experience an increase in absences/refusal to go to school (McClemont et al., 2020), a lowered sense of emotional engagement

(Yang et al., 2018), and increased motor activity/disruption of learning within the classroom (Gomes et al., 2020), poor academic achievement (Lacey et al., 2016; Lacoe, 2016; Woods & Wolke, 2004). After victims finish their primary and secondary academic years, the effects of bullying can follow them into their post-secondary careers. Post-secondary students who have been victims of bullying can experience anxiety (Pörhölä et al., 2019), continued victimization (Adams & Lawrence, 2011), heightened symptoms of stress (Newman et al., 2005), and poor academic achievement (Young-Jones et al., 2014). Further, adults who have been victims of bullying can have trouble in their overall functioning, specifically with suicide ideations and attempts (Schäfer et al., 2004). Victims are also more likely to experience a decrease in their mental health, particularly depression (Kim et al., 2020), anxiety (Oblath et al., 2019), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Manrique et al., 2019).

Bullying is a nation-wide phenomenon. Most schools have interventions and/or programs in place in order to decrease the frequency of bullying. Yeager et al. (2011) studied a self-entity theory, which is the idea that abilities and characteristics are fixed traits. This study highlights the importance of implementing interventions and or/programs within the education setting. Some interventions that have been implemented and deemed to be successful in decreasing the frequency of bullying include: emphasizing the importance of proactive behavior (Cabrera et al., 2020), allowing students time and space for talking through issues or “Stop, Walk, and Talk” (Letendre et al., 2016), placing youth/peers in charge of delivering anti-bullying content (Connolly et al., 2014), and placing school counselors in charge of delivering anti-bullying content (Mariani et

al., 2015). Some specific programs that have been implemented and deemed to be successful in decreasing the frequency of bullying include: School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports or SWPBIS (Gage et al., 2018) and KiVa, an acronym for "against bullying" (Clarkson et al., 2022).

Limitations of the Research

While gathering research that would answer the questions proposed in this thesis, I searched for studies that would answer each question separately. First, I focused on subgroups of students that are at higher risk for experiencing victimization. The scope is narrowed down to gender, sexual orientation, monetary status, and disabilities due to the sheer amount of subgroups of students within a school that could experience bullying. Additionally, it is believed that sexual orientation and monetary status are the driving factors behind the school shooting I experienced in 2003. I now am a special education teacher, so I utilized my interests to answer this question. Second, I focused on the possible effects of bullying victimization. I collected studies on impacts within the educational setting, long-term impacts, and impacts on mental health in an attempt to convey the devastating consequences of bullying in full. Third, I focused on interventions and programs that are currently in place and have had success in decreasing the frequency of bullying. I did not include studies that were not reported to be successful.

It is important to note that due to a majority of the studies in the literature utilizing questionnaires and interviews, incidences of bullying victimization and bullying perpetration are self-reported. This can impact the accuracy of the data being collected and presented within the studies. Further, an individual's perception of what constitutes

bullying can vary. In addition, students may not feel comfortable reporting their experiences and/or did not take the matter seriously. Effects of bullying have been found to include stress, depression, and anxiety, and these can all be experienced on a spectrum. What one individual may deem stressful, another individual may not. Again, this can impact what data is being collected and presented within the studies.

I was perplexed to find that there was limited research on interventions and programs designed to decrease the frequency of bullying within the educational setting. I had intentions of including specific interventions and programs and how they were implemented within schools, but could only find two programs with documented success. With reports of bullying, school shootings, and mental health struggles appearing to be on the rise, why are these types of programs not focused on more heavily?

Implications for Future Research

It is clear that there is a call to action for decreasing the frequency at which bullying occurs within our schools. Throughout my research, it appeared that European countries such as Finland and United Kingdom have conducted more studies on anti-bullying programs being implemented within their schools than the United States of America. While data pertaining to the rate at which bullying occurs and the negative effects it can result in seems plentiful, prevention does not appear to be highlighted as much. In the future, I hope (and pray) for more information on the success rates of bullying prevention interventions and programs.

Implications for Professional Application

When I was twelve years old, I watched two families in my community go through what I imagine to be some of the worst pain possible. Two lives were lost in my school's shooting, and the shooter's motive was retaliation to alleged bullying. I watched a classmate lose her brother, I watched our beloved gym teacher be praised for saving additional lives by demanding the shooter put down the gun, and I watched our small community change and come together in love and comradery. When I was twelve years old, I did not know I would become a teacher and carry the lessons that I learned that day with me.

As a special education teacher, my main focus is the well-being of my students. I believe that students need to have their most basic needs met, which includes feeling safe, in order to learn at their highest capacity. Students cannot be expected to feel safe when they are entering schools and being verbally and physically assaulted. Of course, this is not to say that every student will be a victim of bullying throughout their academic careers. However, I would assume that most students have been a victim in some way, shape, or form. Too often, I feel that acts of bullying are "laughed off" or taken too lightly by both students and teachers alike. Providing information about who is more likely to be at risk of bullying victimization and emphasizing the negative effects bullying can have on the students who are involved can highlight the severity of bullying and the importance of implementing an anti-bullying curriculum within our classrooms.

To the best of my knowledge, a majority of schools implement anti-bullying curriculum or character development curriculum. The findings within the literature should encourage educators to implement these curriculums with fidelity in order to decrease

acts of bullying and increase feelings of safety. Further, administration teams should distribute culture/climate surveys to students in hopes of hearing voices that may not otherwise be heard.

As stated previously, there appear to be less studies regarding the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in the United States than in some European countries. The United States should place more importance on these studies with the hopes of finding effective programs that may be implemented country-wide.

Conclusion

Bullying is a prevalent, nationwide phenomenon. There are subgroups of students who are more likely to experience bullying victimization, and some of those subgroups include: females, heterosexuals (specifically male heterosexuals), welfare recipients, and students who receive special education services. The consequences of being a victim of bullying can be severe. Victims can experience higher rates of chronic absenteeism, less emotional engagement within the school setting, poor academic achievement, more symptoms associated with stress, higher rates of anxiety and depression, and even higher rates of suicide idealization. In order to decrease the frequency of bullying, anti-bullying interventions and programs have been implemented with reported success. Interventions such as highlighting the importance of proactive behavior (being an “upstander”), incorporating youth or school counselor led programs, and “Stop, Walk, and Talk” have helped decrease the frequency of bullying within schools. Programs such as the School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

in the United States and Kiva in Europe have also helped decrease the frequency of bullying within schools. Moving forward, more emphasis should be placed on the implementation of these interventions and programs to increase the likelihood that students feel safe when they are in their learning environments.

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