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ANTI-BULLYING PRACTICES IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS: PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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A random sample of 213 school psychologists working in a school setting completed a survey on their schools' current anti-bullying practices. Talking with bullies following bullying incidents, disciplinary consequences for bullies, and increasing adult supervision were the three most frequently used strategies. Peer juries/court, an anti-bullying committee, and peer counselors were least frequently used, according to respondents. School-wide positive behavior support, modifying space and schedule, and immediate responses to bullying incidents were perceived as most effective, whereas avoiding contact between bullies and victims, a zero-tolerance policy with bullies, and a written anti-bullying policy were least effective. Results and implications are discussed within the context of empirically supported practices. © 2010 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Bullying is a specific form of aggressive behavior that is characterized by an intention to harm, repeated occurrence, and an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Limber, 2002; Olweus, 1993). The aggressive behavior can be physical (e.g., hitting, kicking) or verbal (e.g., teasing, taunting). In addition, bullying can be administered through electronic text, known as cyberbullying (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008). Furthermore, relational aggression is a more indirect form of bullying that involves behaviors intended to control or harm relationships, such as gossip, rumors, and exclusion (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999). Studies have indicated that, across grade levels, approximately one in five children and adolescents are victims of bullying (Limber, 2002) and one in three are involved as a bully, victim, or both (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying can have negative effects on the psychological, physical, and social adjustment of students who are involved as bullies or victims (Rigby, 2000; Sharp, 1995), and those who witness bullying (Hazler, 1996).

Clearly, bullying is a prevalent problem that can result in negative outcomes. This issue has received international attention; despite its importance, little is known regarding American schools' current status pertaining to bullying prevention/intervention efforts. Information such as the specific anti-bullying activities that are implemented in schools, the perceived effectiveness of strategies being used, the need for improvement, and the potential barriers to doing so may advance our understanding in current anti-bullying practices. Practicing school psychologists are in an ideal position to assume leadership roles in violence and bullying prevention and intervention (Furlong, Morrison, & Pavelski, 2000). Indeed, this is a major domain of practice according to professional standards, and there are specific roles for school psychologists in terms of bullying prevention and intervention, including promoting awareness, assessing prevalence, spearheading prevention efforts, intervening when it occurs, and developing school-wide policies (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

Bullying is a multifaceted problem that necessitates anti-bullying activities that address all factors surrounding the problem of bullying. To place this study in context, bullying prevention/intervention strategies are reviewed under five categories: (a) systems-level interventions, (b) school staff and parent involvement, (c) educational approaches with students, (d) student involvement, and (e) interventions with bullies and victims.

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Systems-Level Interventions

There are various anti-bullying strategies that aim to alter the broader school environment. A school-wide anti-bullying policy provides a framework that guides the school's actions to address the problem of bullying (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003). This type of policy has been widely embraced in numerous comprehensive anti-bullying programs internationally that have been shown to be effective (Hanewinkel, 2004; Olweus, 1993). Olweus (1993) recommended that schools form an anti-bullying committee to facilitate and coordinate bullying prevention/intervention efforts. There is, however, some indication that this type of committee has been used inconsistently and infrequently in American schools (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2004; Limber, Nation, Tracy, Melton, & Flerx, 2004).

Other systems-level interventions focus on providing data about the occurrence of the problem of bullying. Conducting a school-wide bullying survey to provide baseline data and raise awareness about bullying (Olweus, 1993) has been adopted in many anti-bullying programs (e.g., Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1994); however, the surveys have not been widely implemented in American schools (Dake et al., 2004). Another systems-level strategy to increase awareness of bullying involves instituting tracking and reporting procedures (e.g., phones, report forms, drop boxes; Suckling & Temple, 2002).

Because bullying occurs more frequently in less structured school locations (e.g., playground, cafeteria; Meraviglia et al., 2003), strategies have been suggested to target these areas. These strategies include improving recess by making the playground visible and safe and structuring it in a way to promote cooperation (Rigby, 2004), modifying passing time between classes (Carney & Merrell, 2001), and staggering lunch and recess (Suckling & Temple, 2002).

School Staff and Parent Involvement

There are primarily two approaches to involving school staff in reducing bullying: providing staff training and increasing adult supervision. Training staff and providing continuous support in the form of group meetings have been shown to enhance teachers' abilities to handle bullying problems (Alsaker, 2004; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Increasing adult supervision in less structured settings where bullying may be more likely to occur is another strategy used to reduce bullying incidents (DeVoe, Kaffenberger, & Chandler, 2005).

There are several approaches to involving parents in anti-bullying efforts. These include raising awareness of bullying by inviting parents to a school anti-bullying conference day (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999) and distributing newsletters to communicate with parents about bullying, school policies, and activities to support anti-bullying concepts and skills taught to students (Frey et al., 2005; Olweus et al., 1999). Another way to involve parents is to consult with them when the school bullying policy and programs are being created (Sharp & Thompson, 1994). Finally, meeting with parents of victims and bullies when incidents occur is recommended as a way to increase direct involvement (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Olweus, 1993).

Educational Approaches with Students

"Educational approaches with students" refers to adult-led prevention activities targeting the entire school population that are designed to provide information and knowledge, raise awareness and concerns, and change attitudes and behaviors related to bullying problems. Establishing classroom rules against bullying, having consequences for violations of rules, and holding regular classroom meetings to facilitate the discussion of bullying problems and peer relations are all part of Olweus's (1993) Bullying Prevention Program. Research in American schools has revealed that these rules and meetings often do not take place as intended due to difficulty allotting time to regularly hold a

class meeting (Limber et al., 2004). Another adult-led prevention activity that has been suggested to be used as part of anti-bullying efforts is cooperative group work, where students work together in small groups toward a common goal (Cowie & Berdondini, 2001; Ortega & Lera, 2000).

Delivering formally planned educational curricula related to bullying and victimization in the classroom is another educational approach (Meraviglia et al., 2003; Rahey & Craig, 2002). These curricula often involve teaching conflict resolution, emotion management, and problem-solving skills, and they help students develop specific protective strategies to use when they are bullied (Frey et al., 2005; Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 2000).

Student Involvement in Prevention and Intervention Efforts

There are many strategies aimed at getting students actively involved in bullying prevention and intervention. Peer-support systems involve training a small group of peer helpers in intervention skills that allow them to provide victims with various forms of support, under adult supervision, during or after bullying incidents (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). Peer mediation has been used to reduce aggression and resolve conflicts (Burrell, Zirbel, & Allen, 2003), although it has been cautioned that this approach may be harmful given the power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Limber, 2002). In British schools, students have taken part in school-based legalistic procedures (i.e., bully courts), where a student accused of bullying is brought in front of a panel of peers who, under adult supervision, make a judgment about the accused person's guilt (Madhavi & Smith, 2002; Smith, Cowie, & Sharp, 1994).

Interventions with Bullies and Victims

It has been recommended that school staff meet with involved students immediately following bullying incidents to communicate that bullying is not acceptable and to provide victims with psychological support (Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Several adult-led, problem-solving mediation models (e.g., Method of Shared Concern; Pikas, 1989) have been proposed to guide the process of interviewing the bully or bullies, interviewing the victim(s) separately, and holding follow-up meetings with all students involved, including bystanding peers (Maines & Robinson, 1991; Young, 1998).

More long-term interventions with bullies and victims involve providing individual and/or group counseling to address individual characteristics that place children at risk for bullying and victimization. Recommended foci of counseling with bullies include non-aggressive conflict resolution, empathy, cognitive retraining, social skills, and anger management (DeRosier, 2004; Macklem, 2003). Interventions focused on building self-esteem are not recommended given the finding that bullies tend to have high levels of self-esteem (Salmivalli, Kaukianien, Kaistaniemi, & Lagerspetz, 1999). Assertiveness, awareness and regulation of emotions, interpersonal problem solving and co-operation, and friendship-making skills are the most frequently recommended skills for victims to develop (Sharp & Cowie, 1994; Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001).

Purpose of Study

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed limited information regarding current anti-bullying practices in American schools. The survey by Dake and colleagues (2004) investigated elementary schools' use of only three bullying prevention strategies: having a school conference to raise awareness, establishing an anti-bullying committee, and administering a bullying survey. According to their study, less than one-fifth of the American elementary schools surveyed had an anti-bullying committee in place or conducted a school-wide bullying assessment. In addition, only 4% of schools surveyed had an anti-bullying conference day to raise awareness. This survey,

however, did not include many other bullying prevention and intervention strategies recommended in the international bullying literature, such as staff training and anti-bullying educational curricula. It also did not examine anti-bullying practices in middle schools. More information is needed to better understand the current status of anti-bullying practices in American schools.

This study addressed the following questions: (a) What anti-bullying strategies are most/least frequently implemented in American schools? (b) What anti-bullying strategies do school psychologists perceive as most effective/ineffective? (c) What areas do school psychologists perceive as most in need of improvement? and (d) What barriers make the improvement difficult?

<div align="center">METHOD</div>

Participants and Sampling

Participants included a random sample of 213 National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) members who were school psychologists working within a school setting. A systematic random sampling method was used to select potential participants from the membership directory of NASP. Only members who were currently practicing in the school setting were sampled. For random sampling, the list was divided by state in which the school psychologist practiced. The sampling procedure consisted of taking the total number of members practicing in schools ($N = 11,636$) and dividing it by the desired sample size (500) to obtain the sampling interval of 23. The number 8 was randomly selected to start (Mangione, 1995); therefore, in each list, the 8th, 31st, 54th, 77th, and so on names were included in the sample.

Demographic information about the respondents is displayed in Table 1. The demographic characteristics of respondents were generally consistent with those of national samples of school psychologists reported by other researchers (e.g., Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Reschly, 2000), including

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	166	77.9
Male	47	22.1
Highest Academic Degree Received		
Master's	59	27.7
Specialist (EdS, CAS, CAGS)	99	46.5
Doctorate (PhD, PsyD, EdD)	55	25.8
No. of Years Practicing as a School Psychologist*		
1–5	48	22.6
6–10	39	18.4
11–15	13	6.1
16–20	33	15.6
21+	79	37.2
Quality of Anti-Bullying Training*		
Poor	34	16.2
Fair	112	53.3
Good	52	24.8
Excellent	12	5.7

*$N < 213$ due to missing data.

sex, years of experience, and highest degree earned. Given that school psychologists often serve more than one school, respondents were asked to answer the survey questions based on the school in which they spent most of their weekdays. The majority of the schools about which respondents answered the survey questions were elementary schools (64.5%), as compared to middle schools (22.5%) or high schools (13%). Fifty-three percent of respondents worked in schools located in urban fringe/large towns, 28.4% were in small town or rural settings, and 18.3% worked in a central city school. Most respondents worked in schools with a student population of 300–599 (35.4%) or 600–999 (34.9%).

Measure

Current Bullying Prevention/Intervention Activities. The survey instrument was developed based on existing theoretical and empirical information about school-based bullying prevention and intervention. The four-page questionnaire contained three sections. The first section obtained general information about the respondent and the school for which he or she answered the question-naire. The second section obtained information about bullying prevention and intervention activities implemented within respondents' schools. A comprehensive literature search in PsycINFO using keywords such as "bullying," "prevention," and "intervention" was performed. Anti-bullying strate-gies resulting from the search that addressed similar factors were grouped together to produce the following six domains: school environment, staff involvement, parent involvement, educating stu-dents, peer involvement, and working with bullies and victims. A total of 43 anti-bullying strategies were included in this section. Similar strategies were combined to reduce the length of the survey. For 39 strategies, respondents provided frequency of use of each strategy on a 5-point rating scale (1 = *never,* 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *always*, 5 = *don't know*). On the remaining four strate-gies (anti-bullying policy, anti-bullying committee, school-wide positive behavior support plan, and reporting procedures), respondents indicated whether their schools used each strategy by circling *yes*, *no*, or *don't know* because these strategies are either in place or not and rating the frequency of usage does not apply to them.

In the last section, respondents provided opinions about the most and least effective anti-bullying strategies and the anti-bullying areas most in need of improvement by selecting three options from a list of 20. The list of 20 anti-bullying areas was developed by further grouping the 43 anti-bullying strategies from the second section into 20 areas to reduce length. For example, improving the quality of recess was included under modifying space and schedule; the six staff involvement strategies were grouped into two areas: staff education and training and increase supervision in less structured and invisible locations. In addition, information about barriers was obtained by providing several options and having respondents check all that applied. The draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by a convenience sample of 10 practicing school psychologists with varying lengths of experience in practicing school psychology. Based on their feedback, the wording of a few items was changed to improve clarity. A complete copy of the survey is available upon request from the first author.

Procedure

The survey was mailed to 500 potential participants in October 2006. As compensation for participants' efforts, a copy of a bibliographical review of anti-bullying was included in the initial mailing. Two weeks after the original mailing, a follow-up reminder was e-mailed to all individuals who did not respond to the original mailing. Then, 2 weeks following the reminder e-mail, surveys were mailed again all nonrespondents urging their participation. Two hundred twenty-eight surveys were returned, and 213 were interpretable because 15 individuals were either already retired or no longer working within a school setting (return rate of 43.9%).

Table 2
Most and Least Frequently Implemented Anti-Bullying Strategies

Most Frequently Implemented Strategies	Frequency (%)
School staff having a talk with bullies following bullying incidents	206 (97.2)
Disciplinary consequences (i.e., suspension, expulsion) for bullies	205 (96.7)
Increased supervision in less structured areas (e.g., playground, cafeteria)	203 (95.8)
School staff having a talk with victims following bullying incidents	200 (94.3)
Individual counseling with bullies (e.g., empathy, anger management)	196 (92.5)
Individual counseling with victims (e.g., assertiveness, problem solving)	190 (89.6)
Classroom rules against bullying	190 (89.6)
Engaging students in cooperative group work	190 (89.6)
Procedures to avoid contact between the bullies and victims	182 (85.8)
Identifying students at-risk for bullying and providing intervention	177 (83.5)
Least Frequently Implemented Strategies	
Peer juries/court to "try" bullies	17 (8.0)
Anti-bullying committee to coordinate activities	46 (21.7)
Student peer counseling for victims	56 (26.4)
Student-led anti-bullying activities (e.g., assemblies, dramas, discussions)	74 (34.9)
Anti-bullying resources for nonteaching staff (e.g., bus driver)	75 (35.4)
Formal participation of students in decision making about bullying	77 (36.3)
Anti-bullying training for nonteaching staff (e.g., bus driver)	81 (38.2)
Weekly class meetings to discuss bullying and peer conflicts	86 (40.6)
School-wide survey to assess the extent and nature of bullying problems	87 (41.0)
Formal reporting procedures (e.g., hotlines, report forms, bully box)	90 (42.5)

RESULTS

Current Bullying Prevention and Intervention Practices

Listed in Table 2 are the 10 most frequently implemented anti-bullying strategies in respondents' schools. Almost all respondents reported that their schools have school staff talk with bullies following bullying incidents (97.2%) and use disciplinary consequences such as suspension and expulsion for bullies (96.7%). Other anti-bullying strategies reportedly implemented in more than 90% of respondents' schools included increasing adult supervision in less structured locations (95.8%), school staff having a talk with victims following bullying incidents (94.3%), and individual counseling with bullies (92.5%). As illustrated in Table 2, peer juries/court to "try" bullies was the least frequently implemented anti-bullying strategy (8.0%). Other less frequently implemented anti-bullying strategies included an anti-bullying committee (21.7%), students working as peer counselors (26.4%), students taking leadership roles in anti-bullying activities (34.9%), and anti-bullying written or Web-based resources for nonteaching staff (35.4%). In addition, more than half of respondents indicated that their schools used group counseling with bullies (59.0%) and peer mediation (51.4%) in their anti-bullying practices.

Respondents reported that their schools most frequently used strategies related to working with bullies and victims (80.5%). Also, 6 of the 10 most frequently implemented anti-bullying strategies were related to working with bullies and victims (60%). The second most frequently implemented anti-bullying component was strategies involving parents (70.4%). Respondents reported that their schools least frequently implemented strategies related to involving peers (38.9%). There were also more strategies related to involving peers (40%) than strategies within other components among the 10 least frequently implemented anti-bullying strategies.

Table 3
Perceived Most Effective and Most Ineffective Anti-Bullying Strategies (Frequencies)

Anti-Bullying Strategy	Most Effective	Most Ineffective
School-wide positive behavior support plan	83	6
Modified space and schedule for less structured activities	65	22
Immediate responses to bullying incidents	57	6
Written anti-bullying policy	53	43
Increased supervision in less structured locations	51	23
Staff education and training	44	8
Zero-tolerance policy with bullies	34	45
Anti-bullying educational activities with students	31	8
Counseling bullies	24	38
Bullying reporting procedure	23	17
Avoid contact between bullies and victims	23	46
Counseling victims	18	10
Interventions for students at risk as bully or victim	17	17
Student involvement in bullying prevention	15	7
Student involvement in intervention (e.g., peer mediation)	11	12
Adult mediation (e.g., Method of Shared Concern)	10	19
School-wide survey to assess bullying problems	8	27
Parent involvement in bullying intervention	8	27
Anti-bullying committee to coordinate activities	4	19
Parent involvement in bullying prevention	3	30

Perceptions of Current Anti-Bullying Practices

The frequencies of each strategy identified as most effective and most ineffective are presented in Table 3. The three strategies most frequently identified as most effective were a school-wide positive behavior support plan ($N = 83$), modifying space and schedule for less structured activities ($N = 65$), and immediate responses to bullying incidents ($N = 57$). Procedures to avoid contact between the bullies and victims was most frequently identified as ineffective ($N = 46$), followed by a zero-tolerance policy with bullies ($N = 45$). A written anti-bullying policy was the third most frequently identified ineffective strategy ($N = 43$); however, it was also identified by 53 respondents as the most effective anti-bullying strategy. In addition, a zero-tolerance policy with bullies was identified by 34 respondents as the most effective anti-bullying strategy. For each strategy that was identified as most/least effective, the response regarding frequency of usage was reviewed to see whether the strategy was implemented in the respondent's school. Fifty-four respondents (25.4%) rated at least one strategy (a total of 84 responses, 8.3%) that was not implemented in their schools as most effective or ineffective, suggesting that respondents did not always respond based on the actual practices in their schools.

The percentages of respondents identifying each of the 20 anti-bullying strategies as in need of improvement are presented in Table 4. The three anti-bullying strategies identified as most in need of improvement were staff education and training (29.1%, $N = 62$), setting up a bullying reporting procedure (25.4%, $N = 54$), and a school-wide positive behavior support plan (22.5%, $N = 48$). The majority of respondents who identified setting up a bullying reporting procedure (78%) and a school-wide positive behavior support plan (85%) as most in need of improvement reported that their schools did not implement these two strategies. Only 14 of the 62 respondents (23%) who identified staff education and training as an area most in need of improvement also reported that

Table 4
Anti-Bullying Strategies Most in Need of Improvement

Anti-Bullying Strategy	Frequency (%)
Staff education and training	62 (29.1)
Bullying reporting procedure	54 (25.4)
School-wide positive behavior support plan	48 (22.5)
Interventions for students at risk for bullying/victimization	47 (22.1)
Student involvement in bullying prevention	44 (20.7)
School-wide survey to assess bullying problems	43 (20.2)
Parent involvement in bullying prevention	37 (17.4)
Student involvement in bullying intervention (e.g., peer mediation)	31 (14.6)
Anti-bullying educational activities with students	28 (13.1)
Written anti-bullying policy	24 (11.3)
Parent involvement in bullying intervention	23 (10.8)
Increased supervision in less structured and invisible locations	22 (10.3)
Adult mediation (e.g., Method of Shared Concern)	22 (10.3)
Anti-bullying committee to coordinate anti-bullying activities	20 (9.4)
Immediate responses to bullying incidents	19 (8.9)
Zero-tolerance policy with bullies	14 (6.6)
Counseling bullies	14 (6.6)
Counseling victims	13 (6.1)
Procedures to avoid contact between the bullies and victims	11 (5.2)
Modifying space and schedule for less structured activities	9 (4.2)

their schools did not provide any form of anti-bullying education and training for school staff. Further analysis indicated that 24% more of respondents who perceived staff education/training as in need of improvement reported providing anti-bullying education/training to teachers at a lower frequency. In addition, approximately 14% more of respondents who identified staff education/training as in need of improvement reported providing anti-bullying education/training to nonteaching staff at a lower frequency.

Respondents were asked to identify barriers that make it difficult to improve the current anti-bullying practices in their schools. The majority of respondents (77.5%, $N = 165$) identified priorities focused on other issues as a barrier to improving their current anti-bullying practices. More than half of respondents (59.6%, $N = 127$) perceived lack of time as a barrier. The third most frequently identified barrier was lack of trained staff (39.4%, $N = 84$). Only 14.1% of respondents perceived lack of support from teachers as a barrier to improving their current bullying prevention and intervention practices.

DISCUSSION

Survey respondents indicated that a variety of strategies were used to address bullying, mostly at the individual bully and victim level as opposed to more system-wide interventions. More specifically, 7 of the 10 most frequently implemented strategies involved individual interventions with bullies and victims, such as talking with them or providing counseling, avoiding contact between the bully and victim, identifying at-risk students, and disciplining students who bully others. In contrast, none of the least frequently implemented strategies involved individual intervention with bullies and victims; rather, these focused on systems-level intervention (anti-bullying committee, surveys, formal reporting system), active involvement of students in bullying prevention and intervention, and providing resources and training for nonteaching staff.

Although there is a paucity of research surveying school psychologists about bullying practices, some of the findings from this study are consistent with existing research. For example, the infrequent use of an anti-bullying committee mirrors the findings of other studies (Dake et al., 2004; Limber et al., 2004). Responding school psychologists indicated that individual interventions with bullies and victims occurred frequently, which suggests that schools respond when bullying incidents occur. Although many of the practices that respondents reported that schools engage in are recommended, such as having individual talks with bullies and victims and enforcing consequences for bullies, the present study did not focus on details of what these interventions entail, which could impact their appropriateness. For example, although it is often necessary and effective to deliver a disciplinary consequence to communicate that bullying is unacceptable and immediately stop the behavior, extreme forms of disciplinary consequences (i.e., suspension and expulsion) have been found to have limited effectiveness and even a negative impact on bullying (Limber, 2002). Although most of the frequently used strategies focused on individual direct interventions, 95.8% of responding school psychologists indicated that increased supervision in unstructured areas was a strategy used. This finding is consistent with best practice recommendations (Macklem, 2003; Olweus, 1993).

Active involvement of students in anti-bullying activities was the least frequently implemented anti-bullying component according to responding school psychologists. Many of these interventions, such as peer support systems, require extra support from staff to provide peer helpers with appropriate supervision (Naylor & Cowie, 1999), which may also explain why schools do not often use peer interventions. Based on results of this study, schools do not seem to provide the same level of training to nonteaching staff as they do to teachers. Given that nonteaching staff are more likely than teachers to be present at school locations where bullying occurs more frequently, such as the playground, cafeteria, school bus, and hallways (DeVoe et al., 2005; Meraviglia et al., 2003), this may be an important area for schools to improve with regard to bullying prevention.

Perceived Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Practices

A school-wide positive behavior support plan, modifying space and schedule for less structured activities, and immediate responses to bullying incidents were most frequently identified by responding school psychologists as effective strategies. Responding school psychologists' perceived effectiveness of these strategies is generally consistent with previous findings and literature recommendations. For example, school-wide positive behavior support plans have been found to reduce antisocial behavior (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001), as well as bullying and victimization (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003). Respondents' endorsement of immediately responding to bullying incidents with serious talks as an effective strategy is consistent with the findings of the Dake and colleagues (2004) survey of elementary school principals, which revealed that this was rated as effective in reducing bullying problems.

Avoiding contact between the bullies and victims, using disciplinary consequences with bullies, and an anti-bullying policy were most frequently identified as ineffective by responding school psychologists. It is possible that respondents perceived that merely separating the bully and the victim does not address many factors that contribute to the problem. It has been asserted that intervening with individual characteristics of bullies and victims associated with bullying behavior may be more promising (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). Using disciplinary consequences with bullies was also one of the most frequently implemented strategies in respondents' schools despite being perceived as one of the most ineffective strategies. As noted previously, information was not gathered about the type of disciplinary consequences used.

School psychologists' perceived effectiveness of an anti-bullying policy was mixed. Although 53 respondents identified it as the most effective strategy, 43 respondents identified it as the most

ineffective. A number of factors may improve the effectiveness of an anti-bullying policy, including consulting members of the school community in the process of policy development, disseminating the anti-bullying policy to all members in the school community, and periodically evaluating and revising the policy (Mahri, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004). Schools may vary in the way they develop and implement their anti-bullying policies, resulting in different perceptions of its effectiveness in reducing the problems of bullying.

Perceived Areas for Improvement

School psychologists identified the following three areas as the most in need of improvement: staff education and training, setting up a bullying reporting procedure, and a school-wide positive behavior support plan. As one may expect, the majority of respondents who identified setting up a bullying reporting procedure and a school-wide positive behavior support plan as most in need of improvement reported that their schools did not implement these two strategies. These findings suggest that school psychologists acknowledged these areas as weaknesses of their anti-bullying practices. It is surprising that only one-fourth of respondents who perceived staff education and training in need of improvement reported not providing any form of anti-bullying education/training for school staff. Further analysis indicated that more respondents who perceived staff education and training in need of improvement reported providing staff training at a lower frequency (i.e., never and sometimes, as opposed to often and always). There were also more schools that did not include nonteaching staff in training.

Perceived Barriers

The most frequently identified barrier by school psychologists was priorities focused on other issues. There are many other important issues that demand American schools' attention, such as academic performance and graduation rates. It also suggests, however, that the severity of bullying problems may currently be underestimated in American schools. Similarly, in Dake and colleagues' (2004) survey, elementary school principals rated the extent of bullying in American elementary schools as a whole to be significantly greater than it is in their own schools. Dake and colleagues attributed the finding to school professionals' lack of awareness of the extent of bullying problems in their schools.

Lack of trained staff was also a frequently identified barrier. According to data collected by Furlong, Morrison, and Grief (2003) from State Departments of Education, 39 states reported that they provided training or workshops about bullying to students, teachers, and school personnel. Given that school personnel continue to perceive lack of trained staff as a problem, the authors suggested that there may be a need to improve the quality of current anti-bullying training that school personnel receive.

Implications for Practice

Responding school psychologists' perceptions of the use and effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies reveal some themes that may be useful for schools to consider in addressing these issues. The finding that the frequently used strategies involve bullies and victims suggests that there is room for improvement in implementing systems-level prevention and intervention efforts. For example, a number of anti-bullying strategies that have been highly recommended in the literature (e.g., anti-bullying educational curriculum for students, school-wide bullying survey, formal reporting procedure) do not appear to be used frequently in the schools where responding school psychologists spent most of their time. It is important that school psychologists promote improvement in these areas to ensure effective bullying prevention and intervention.

The reported infrequent use of strategies that actively involve students in addressing the problem may be an area to target for improvement, particularly because comprehensive efforts involve peers (Nickerson, Brock, Chang, & O'Malley, 2006), who are regarded as critical change agents in reducing peer victimization (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). There are many ways that students could be involved, from contributing to the development of school policy, to providing support for victims of bullying, to participating in problem solving. In addition, there is growing interest in the study of the minority of children who actively intervene to stop bullying instead of standing by passively (Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008). Working with students to increase these prosocial behaviors may have promise.

There is also an inconsistency between what respondents perceived as effective and what they report being implemented. Staff education and training, particularly for nonteaching staff, is one example. An examination of the results from this study and others (e.g., Furlong et al., 2003) suggests that the quality of staff training in bullying prevention and intervention needs improvement. Finally, it continues to be a common problem that bullying prevention and intervention is not viewed as a priority by schools. School psychologists may seek to change the situation by providing in-service training on bullying and victimization to raise the school community's awareness of the problems and by promoting a school-wide bullying survey.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were several limitations of the current study. First, as with all mail surveys, there is the potential that there were differences between respondents and nonrespondents, which may have impacted the results. Unfortunately, no information was available regarding whether respondents and nonrespondents were different in any systematic way. Moreover, the majority of respondents (64.5%) reported working in elementary schools, limiting the ability to generalize findings to middle and high schools.

Information was obtained by responding school psychologists' perceptions, which may have been biased. It is possible that school psychologists may not be well-suited to report on anti-bullying practices because they tend to work in several schools and spend much of their time in assessment activities. Indeed, when asked to select three most effective/ineffective anti-bullying strategies that were implemented in their schools, some respondents endorsed strategies that were not part of their schools' anti-bullying practices, which could be considered invalid. In future studies, one may obtain information from multiple informants to increase the validity of information.

Although this study provided information about responding school psychologists' perceptions of the use, effectiveness, and limitations of existing practices, more research is needed about the specific strategies used and their demonstrated effectiveness. Respondents simply indicated whether a strategy was used, as opposed to providing specific information about the intervention. Clearly, specific details about interventions and the fidelity with which they were implemented could greatly impact their perceived effectiveness. More empirical studies are needed to examine specific approaches used to address bullying, to assess their impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

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