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TOPIC : BULLYING

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Special Learning



Bullying- General Information

A disturbing, yet growing trend among school age students is bullying. A vast amount of literature on general bullying is available, however, not as much literature on dealing with bullying of students with special needs can be found. This calls for more attention on this topic, as it is a significant one because of the negative consequences of bullying in schools. Bullying is a dangerous practice that makes students feel unsafe and affects their ability to learn.

A. Bullying in Special Education

Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage (2011) studied bullying in special education programs and sought some gaps in the literature and where logical points of intervention may be possible. The authors found several studies that report that students with disabilities are victimized by bullies more than students without disabilities.

Methodology:

This article is a critical review of peer-reviewed literature that addressed the perpetuation and/or victimization of bullying that involved people with disabilities. Participant characteristics in the reviewed literature were variable, but the data had to include the experience of people with disabilities in order to be included in the study.

Results/Outcomes:

The authors were able to identify different types of bullies, different bullying behaviors, and different types of victims. The authors also looked at factors in the school setting that may enhance or prevent bullying behavior, types of disabilities displayed by students who were involved with bullying (both victim and perpetrator), and personality characteristics of bullies and their victims. The authors recommend the following:

1. Interventions should address the school environment as a whole;
2. Individualized interventions should be available for at-risk groups (including students with disabilities);
3. Immediate safety should be the number one priority for any intervention and;
4. Teachers should take a proactive role as enforcers of a zero tolerance policy on bullying.

The authors stressed that, due to the unclear and subjective definition of what bullying behavior is, there are limitations on the existing studies of bullying behavior. There are also fewer studies that address the bullying of students with disabilities, despite these students being targeted more often.

B. Bullying and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders

A study by van Roekel & Scholte (2010) examined bullying and victimization among adolescents with Autism. The authors studied whether adolescents with Autism were able to perceive bullying and victimization and what that entails and also the prevalence of bullying among this population. The authors hypothesized that adolescents with Autism have difficulty recognizing when they are being bullied.

Methodology:

The design of this study was a post-test experimental design that involved 230 adolescents diagnosed with the Autism Spectrum Disorder, attending a special education secondary school. Peer-, teacher- and self-rating assessment were employed in the study on bullying and victimization behaviors. The participants were shown video clips to see if they could identify bullying behavior in others. The authors were interested in the amount of bullying and victimization behavior the participants reported as well as the students' ability to identify bullying behavior in the video clips.

Results/Outcomes:

The study showed that the prevalence of bullying reported through the self-reports and peer reports were much lower than the prevalence of bullying reported by teachers. The authors speculated that this could be because in a special education setting, teachers are more likely to observe the students at all times and can catch any bullying-related behavior and prevent it. These results were the same for reported victimization. The authors stressed that there should be no conclusion drawn about this due to differing interpretations about what constitutes bullying behavior and victimization. The study also showed that the adolescents with Autism seemed to have an accurate perception about what bullying behavior is. The authors did find that students who were bullied often tended to misinterpret non-bullying behavior and bullying behavior in their peers and the more often they bullied others,



the more likely they were to read bullying behavior as non-bullying.

Recommendations

The authors suggest that future studies examine girls with Autism Spectrum Disorders in relation to bullying behaviors.

C. Comparison of Bullying and Victimization Among General and Special Education Students

Rose, Espelage & Monda-Amaya (2009) compared bullying and victimization rates of general education students and special education students. The authors wanted to see the differences in rates of bullying and see if the special education students engaged in more bullying behaviors. They also wanted to find out if special education students experienced more victimization as compared to general education students. The authors hypothesized that special education students would be victimized by bullies and be perpetrators of bullying behavior more than general education students. They also hypothesized that special education students in special education classes would be victimized and be perpetrators more than students who are in inclusive classrooms. The authors also hypothesized that fights between children would occur among special education students more than general education students.

Methodology:

This post-test, non-experimental design involved 14,315 high school students and 7,331 middle school students. It was a combination of special education and general education students. The participants were given a series of assessment tools. These tools were a self-report on bullying perpetration, peer victimization, and a fighting behavior scale.

Results/Outcomes:

The researchers found that students in self-contained special education classrooms reported higher levels of victimization and fighting than students with disabilities in inclusive settings or general education students. The researchers also found that students in self-contained special education settings also participated in more perpetration of bullying. This seemed to be even higher during transition times.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend that future studies might look at bullying prevention programs that target at risk groups (such as students with disabilities) and that the study should be replicated in other regions of the United States (the present study took place in the Midwest).

References

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- Van Roekel, E. & Scholte, R.H. (2010). Bullying among adolescents with autism spectrum disorders: Prevalence and perception. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 40, 63-73.



Bullying- General Information Part 2

Researchers and educators now understand the impact bullying has on an entire school, special education students included. There are many factors that contribute to bullying behavior such as who the bully is, and who becomes victimized by bullies. It is important to continue to research about these factors and also seek effective interventions that can be put into practice in schools so that all students can feel safe. Schools need to be a safe haven where students can learn and grow without having to worry about being the next victim of bullies.

A. Cyber Bullying

The widespread use of the internet and cell phones and the fact that students learn from a very young age how to use the internet has created a whole new way to victimize people via cyber bullying. Didden, et. al. (2009) studied cyber bullying and the variables surrounding the act of cyber bullying (particularly characteristics and frequency) and how these characteristics compared with typical bullying seen in schools.

Methodology:

This non-experimental post-test only design involved the participation of 115 students between the ages of twelve (12) and nineteen (19) years, with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. These participants attended a special education school. In order to qualify to participate, students had to have an IQ of at least 50 and to be able to read the survey questions in the questionnaire. This questionnaire addressed the demographics, self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and internet and cell phone use (particularly addressing bullying and victimization). The authors studied the participants' scores on the Likert-scaled questionnaire for rate of internet use and bullying behaviors and victimization.

Results/Outcomes:

The authors found that cyber bullying was pretty common among the students with disabilities that they surveyed. Rates of cyber bullying and victimization were higher in students with lower self-esteem, students diagnosed with ADHD, and students with depressive symptoms. The authors also found that many students who engaged in cyber bullying online had also been victimized online by cyber bullying.

Recommendations

The authors suggest that future studies use a control group or could compare students' responses to parents' or teachers' responses.

B. Bullying and Children with Speech and Language Difficulties

Lindsay, Dockrell & Mackie (2008) studied the rates of bullying victimization in students with speech and language difficulties. The authors wanted to learn the effects bullying on the self-esteem of children with speech and language differences. They also wanted to find out if being able to navigate socially served as a buffer against bullying for these children. The authors also hypothesized that children who had difficulties with the social aspect of language (pragmatics) would be more likely to be victimized by bullies.

Methodology:

This study employed a post-test only experimental design involving 67 children (16 girls and 51 boys) with a history of speech and language disorders. The mean age of participants was 12.1 years. Two comparison samples were also used (one sample was typical children of the same age and demographic and the other sample was children of the same age and demographic who had other learning disabilities). The participants were assessed of bullying, self-perception, strengths and difficulties and communication and language. The authors wanted to study the scores on the bullying index, the children's self-perception scores, the children's prosocial abilities, and the children's speech and language difficulties.

Results/Outcomes:

The study showed that rates of victimization were a little higher in the children with speech and language difficulties as compared to typically-developing children and children with other learning disabilities, but not higher (both physical and verbal bullying were included). The authors also found that the children with speech and language difficulties and also the children with learning disabilities had lower self-esteem than typically-developing children but this did not correlate with being a victim of bullying. The authors also found no correlation with being a victim of bullying behavior and the type of language difficulty the children showed.



This study also did not show that having more pro-social skills was a protection against being victimized by bullies.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that future studies include long-term follow-up and study children's behavior directly, rather than relying on self-reports.

C. Bullying and Students with Asperger Syndrome

A study by Sofronoff, Dark & Stone (2011) examined bullying and social vulnerability in children with Asperger Syndrome. The authors hoped to study the extent of social vulnerability in children with Asperger Syndrome and also whether social vulnerability had any relationship to bullying. The authors also looked at other factors in children with Asperger Syndrome (anxiety, anger, social skill difficulties, etc.) to see if these factors had any effect on bullying as well.

Methodology:

This study employed a post-test only experimental design of whom the participants were parents of children diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Their children are between the ages of six (6) and sixteen (16), diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. A small control group of parents of typically-developing children was also used for comparison purposes. The parents were given a series of assessment tools and questionnaires that showed demographics, the extent the child was affected by symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome, anxiety levels in the children, maladaptive behavior in the children, anger in the children, social skill ability and social vulnerability in the children and peer relations.

Results/Outcomes:

The researchers found that children with Asperger's Syndrome show social vulnerability, particularly in the areas of over-reactivity to provocation and gullibility. The authors also found that those with higher social vulnerability tend to have poorer social skills, more anxiety, and more anger. They also found a strong positive correlation between bullying and social vulnerability. The individuals who showed more social vulnerability were more likely to be bullied than those who were lower on the social vulnerability scale.

The authors found that out of all the factors considered (anxiety, anger, poor social skills, etc.) only social vulnerability predicted a higher bullying victimization rate independently.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that future studies focus on interventions that train socially vulnerable children to avoid becoming victimized. Using a larger comparison sample of typically-developing children is also advised. Lastly, a longitudinal study methodology to follow-up vulnerable children to see if other factors come into play that may have been missed in the present study would also be ideal.

Resources:

JDidden, R., Scholte, R.H.J., Korzilius, H., De-Moor, J.M.H., Vermeulen, A., O'Reilly, M., Lang, R. & Lancioni, G.E. (2009).

Cyberbullying among students with intellectual and developmental disability in special education settings. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 12(3), 146-151.

Lindsay, G., Dockrell, J.E. & Mackie, C. (2008).

Vulnerability to bullying in children with a history of specific speech and language difficulties. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23(1), 1-16.

Sofronoff, K., Dark, E. & Stone, V. (2011).

Social vulnerability and bullying in children with Asperger syndrome. *Autism*, 15(3), 355-372.



Bullying- Interventions

When discussing interventions for bullying in schools, it is usually advisable to involve the whole system (teachers, administrators, parents, and student groups). Everyone needs to be on the same page in order for system-wide interventions to be effective. With the apparent rise in rate of bullying behavior, it is important that researchers and educators search for and apply the most effective, best practices intervention to address this behavior quickly and effectively.

A. Whole School Approach

Heinrichs (2003) examined a whole school approach to bullying prevention and education. The program had a heavy emphasis on non-tolerance of bullying behavior, consequences for bullying behavior, supervision by school staff, and education about the effects of bullying for all school stakeholders. This type of intervention was developed because many bullied students fear that telling adults will not help and will increase retaliation by the bullies.

Methodology:

This was an informational article about a school-wide bullying prevention program showcasing a series of prevention strategies and an outline of a program that has proven effectiveness in reducing bullying behavior. The school-wide intervention program consisted of:

1. Recognizing and coming up with an operational definition of bullying that the entire school understood;
2. Surveying the student body to gather information about what types of bullying occur in the school setting, where and when these events occur, and how often;
3. Educating and empowering peers who may be bystanders during bullying interactions so that these children can take an active stance against the behavior;
4. Creating clear and immediate consequences for the behavior;
5. Teacher education;
6. Increasing supervision in high-risk areas;
7. Involving parents and;
8. Training students in social skills.

Results/Outcomes:

Heinrichs (2003) suggests that bullying prevention programs, in order to have the maximum effectiveness, must address bullying at all levels. The author suggests that schools need to consider these types of prevention programs due to the prevalence of bullying behavior (especially toward children with special needs) and the fact that research shows that outcomes are sometimes less than optimal for bullies and their victims when they reach adulthood. Increasing awareness and education about what bullying looks like and what children and adults can do to prevent and stop this behavior is necessary to continue to make schools a safe place for children to get an education.

B. Teaching Students with Disabilities to Address Bullying

Vessey & O'Neill (2011) studied resilience-building and a bullying prevention and elimination program with students with disabilities. The authors suggested that school nurses are in a good position to enforce and talk with students about anti-bullying information and interventions due to the fact that they have relationships with the students and can provide on-the-spot interventions while the behavior is happening. The authors hypothesized that students with disabilities would increase their resilience after participating in a school nurse-led support group

Methodology:

The study undertook a two phase, mixed method design. The participants were students with disabilities. They ranged in age from 8-14 years. There were 65 participants total. 66% of the participants were male and 86.5% were White, non-Hispanic. The participants also had many different types of disabilities including physical, mental, developmental, and behavioral. The assessment tools used measured resilience in the participants and the authors wanted to know if the support provided by the nurse will be effective in increasing it.

Results/Outcomes:

The authors also conducted focus groups to see what interventions/education topics are needed and found that feeling special, not keeping secrets, and strength in numbers were factors that worked to reduce bullying and empower victims of bullying. The support group addressed all these



areas and was implemented school wide to reinforce the intervention. The authors reported that participants enjoyed the group.

Recommendations

The authors suggest that future research could study whether the skills learned in the group could be transferable to other settings and situations, could use a control group for comparison.

C. Using a team approach

Biggs, Simpson & Gaus (2010) studied using a team intervention approach to reduce bullying in and toward students with Asperger's Syndrome. The authors specify that most anti-bullying programs do not address the specific needs of students that have disabilities. The authors found that children with Asperger's Syndrome particularly had motor skill deficits, making them seem clumsy. They also manifested social skill deficits which made them more susceptible to bullying from other students. These deficits often cause students with Asperger's Syndrome to miss out on physical education (a place where bullying often occurs) and youth sports. The authors looked at a team-type approach to reduce bullying behavior that involves strategic people in the school setting.

Methodology:

This article is a discussion of anti-bullying strategies and their effectiveness. A team approach involving certain key players in the school setting such as school social workers, physical education teachers, case workers and IEP team members was used and its effectiveness in reducing bullying behavior toward individuals with Asperger's Syndrome was assessed.

Results/Outcomes:

The researchers found that adding a social worker to the team approach adds a necessary element to the intervention. The approach that seems effective, according to the authors, involves:

1. Education for the school personnel;
2. A zero tolerance policy for bullying behavior;
3. Creating a buddy system so classmates can assist

the child with a disability;

4. Becoming a partner against bullying;
5. Helping the children with disabilities learn to identify high risk areas in school (ex: bathrooms);
6. Role-playing what to do with children;
7. Always practicing inclusion in as many activities as possible;
8. Teaching children to respect differences ;
9. Teaching about and encouraging the reporting of acts of bullying as soon as possible and offering support and counseling to the victims.

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Bullying and Inclusion

The ideal situation for students with disabilities is inclusion in as many activities as possible. Inclusion creates less stigma, more opportunities for "normalcy" and more socialization and friendship opportunities. Unfortunately, with inclusion come opportunities for bullying behavior both from and toward students with disabilities.

A. Social Inclusion in Secondary Schools

Symes & Humphrey (2010) examined inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in secondary schools and found that students with Autism have specific communication and social needs based around social interaction. Deficiencies in these areas create the exclusion that these students often have to contend with. The authors wanted to conduct this study to focus on social success in inclusion rather than academic success. They also wanted to look at bullying and peer support. They hypothesized that students with Autism would have less peer support, less social acceptance and experience more bullying than typical students. A comparison group of students with dyslexia also participated.

Methods:

This quasi-experimental design involved 120 students, 109 of whom were males and 11 of whom were females with a mean age of 13 years and 9 months. It studied the amount of bullying experienced by the participants and the amount of support and acceptance from their peers they had and correlated it if they had Autism, dyslexia or were typically-developing children.

Results/Outcomes:

The authors found that, as a whole, the group of students with Autism were more likely than students with dyslexia or typical students to experience peer rejection, have less peer support, and experience bullying. The authors suggested that the students with Autism had less peer support because they struggle with socialization and have difficulties interacting with their peers. Future studies could examine the effectiveness of interventions that support the building of social capital and networks in children with Autism.

B. Strategies for Including Students with Autism in Mainstream Schools

With the right strategies in place, inclusion of students with Autism can reduce bullying behavior due to the increase in awareness of typically-developing students and the experience of having a student with disabilities in the classroom. The more typically-developing students are exposed to students with disabilities, the more likely they are to increase their acceptance of these students and thus reduce bullying behavior toward these students. Humphrey (2008) studied inclusion strategies for students with Autism.

Methods:

This article is a review of inclusion strategies for students with Autism to facilitate their success in inclusion in mainstream schools. The article discussed recommended inclusion strategies and these are: including education to teach students about stereotypes of people with disabilities and that they should still have high expectations of people with disabilities, have daily routines and schedules so increase the comfort level of students with Autism; encourage peer support to combat bullying behavior from others; help children with Autism develop social skills and understand social norms; adapt school work and activities whenever possible; and keep language concrete so children with Autism can understand and participate in conversations. The article sought to find out if bullying and exclusion is reduced in schools when such inclusion strategies are employed.

Results/Outcomes:

The author suggested that there are many more strategies and factors involved in the successful inclusion of students with Autism and the reduction of bullying of students with Autism in a mainstream school setting. The author also suggested that successful inclusion needs to involve the parents and the community as well as the school itself. This whole environmental approach could create the best outcome for students with Autism as they work on being included into their peer groups. The author also stressed the importance of attitude and philosophy change in addition to the suggested strategies.



C. Students' Views and Experiences on Inclusion and Bullying

This study by Norwich & Kelly (2004) examined students' perspectives of being included or rejected in school. The authors hoped to examine how students with learning disabilities view their experience and accommodations in school. It was also the authors' goals: to measure positive and negative aspects of having a disability per student reports; to study students' views of themselves and their responses to other's reactions to them; and to see if the students' responses vary in different educational environments.

Methods:

This study employed a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews. 101 students from both mainstream and special schools participated in this study. The breakdown is as follows: 27 boys from mainstream schools, 24 girls from mainstream schools, 26 boys from special schools, 24 girls from special schools. The participants ranged in age from 10-14 years and all were diagnosed with a moderate learning disability. They were interviewed about their views and thoughts about their experiences in the school system in regards to their disability and how other students react to them..

Results/Outcomes:

The researchers found that the majority of students in both mainstream and special schools reported a positive feeling toward the school environment. Many students reported that they were made fun of by classmates for having a support person to assist them in school. Many students reported that they had experienced name calling, teasing, and bullying in their school. Most students reported a negative response to bullying from other students, including being upset, hurt, or withdrawing from the other students. The students realized that the bullying was related to their learning disabilities and there was no difference in gender in those who experienced bullying. The authors reported that mainstream students reported less bullying than those who attended special schools.

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