AN EXAMINATION OF THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING IN AN AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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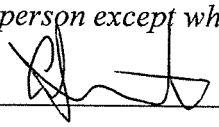
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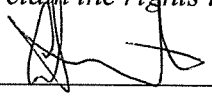
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ABSTRACT

The study identified and analysed the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the prevalence of bullying in one Australian primary school. Perceptions were identified utilising a mixed methods approach. Four teachers and 89 students completed questionnaires following which three teachers participated in focus group discussions. Findings established that a discrepancy existed between the students' and teachers' perceptions of the exposure of 89 Year 3 and 4 students to peer victimisation. The identification of high levels of bullying in the school precinct was consistent with many other studies on this topic. This study supported the findings of a previous 2007 study in finding that the teachers in the group underestimated the number of students exposed to peer victimisation. However, this study was unique in including the perceptions of Year 3 students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in the school precinct appears to have increased in prevalence as it has developed over time into an ever-changing phenomenon that appears unstoppable. Copious amounts of research on the topic of bullying have been conducted worldwide, however, only a limited number of studies have taken place in Australia into the differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of bullying at the same site. Differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of bullying have the potential to influence the intervention and coping strategies utilised. The present study aims to identify, interpret, analyse and understand various types of information regarding the awareness of bullying from both teacher and student perspectives.

The NSW Department of Education insists that all students have the right to come to school, be free from peer-victimisation, and feel safe in their learning environment (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2005). While teachers may be cognisant that bullying is occurring within their school, research suggests that they often underestimate the level of bullying and its ramifications upon the students within their own school setting (Bradshaw, Sawyer & O'Brennan, 2007). These ramifications have both short-term and long-term consequences for students.

Background to the Study

The researcher's personal interest in the topic of bullying stemmed from an interest in children's well being and its impact on learning. Knowing that children should be able to attend school and feel safe while they learn became an important factor in this choice of topic for an honours project. As a student, the researcher witnessed

bullying during the years of primary school, behaviour which continued, albeit on a reduced scale, throughout the high school period. Since that time, concern for children's welfare and the requirement for schools to keep children safe in the learning environment, has developed into an important personal issue for the researcher. A secure and appropriate environment is a precondition for learning, a concept supported by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2005). Therefore, the present study assumes that identifying the discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying will be an important step towards addressing this harmful social issue.

Much of the bullying occurring around the school community was, and still is, passed off as childhood banter that will, over time, be resolved by the children themselves. The researcher takes the view that this myth is unhelpful and should be replaced by a more accurate understanding of peer-victimisation and the extent of its impact on students, many of whom, suffer in silence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present thesis is to:

- Identify and describe teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in Years 3 and 4 at one NSW public school;
- Identify students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the same two classes as reported by students in the classes;
- Compare the teachers' perceptions of the level of bullying with the students' perceptions;

- Use the data to interpret, analyse and understand the various types of information regarding the awareness of bullying from both teacher and student perspectives.

Research Questions

The questions guiding the study were: (a) What are the students perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the school precinct in the NSW school investigated? (b) What perceptions of the level of bullying do the teachers of those students hold? (c) What are the similarities and differences between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying?

Significance of the Study

Bullying affects large numbers of students in many countries (Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 2008) and Australia is not immune from this problem (Rigby, 1997, 2008). Olweus (1994) found 15% of Norwegian primary school students were bullied now and then, while 3% were bullied at least once per week. Research in other countries has found similar or higher levels (e.g., Smith & Sharpe, 1994). Rigby (2008) found similar levels in Australia with the highest percentage of reported victimisation of Australian school children across Years 4-12 being in Year 4.

Everyone wants to be understood, including children. All people want to know that someone understands the challenges they are facing and what issues they are coping with on a daily basis. If students believe their teachers do not understand, or unaware that they are being bullied, it can be an isolating experience that impacts on their feelings of self-worth.

While many previous studies have identified the prevalence of bullying in schools, few have explored the discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of the level of bullying. This examination of this inconsistency of the perception of the prevalence of bullying as perceived by teachers and students provides a basis for a fruitful analysis of the situation, which is likely occurring in classrooms across Australia.

The present study examined two Year 3 and Year 4 classes which according to Rigby's (2008) research could include the highest prevalence of bullying. While this study is only small, it provides unique insights into the inconsistency between Australian primary school teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of peer-victimisation and the level of bullying as perceived and reported by students from the classes of the teachers in the study.

Theoretical Framework

Bullying is not a new problem and therefore many teachers' understanding of bullying may be expected to be primarily influenced by their knowledge, understanding and personal experiences of prior peer-victimisation that they have experienced as a student or in their teaching career to date. From these prior experiences teachers can be expected to have acquired personal definitions of bullying from professional development, and their prior personal experiences either as a bully, bystander, victim of bullying, or teacher-resolver. These experiences may be expected to influence their perceptions of the severity of bullying and the responses they select. In addition, their perceptions may be affected by their personal

values, role expectations, the moral code they espouse, their motives and their expectations regarding the appropriate for the context (Watts, 1997).

However, both teachers and students are required to make decisions about what they will do when confronted by an instance of bullying, either to themselves as victim, as a bully perpetrator, as a supervising teacher, or student teacher. Thus the options may be seen as one of the four following options:

Table 1. Four Key Roles in Bullying Occurrences

Teacher as victim	Student as victim
Teacher as bully	Student as bully

In addition, teachers and students may be bystanders and thus the number of options can be expanded as follows:

Table 2. Further Key Roles in Bullying Occurrences

Teacher as victim	Teacher as bully
Teacher as bully	Student as bully
Teacher as bystander	Student as bystander

Ultimately the types of decisions that both teachers and students make, will depend on their perceptions of the contextual factors, various types of beliefs that they hold, their knowledge about what constitutes bullying and their past experiences of bullying behaviour. The relationship between each of the various concepts is illustrated in the theoretical framework for the study outlined in Figure 1 modified from Watts (1997).

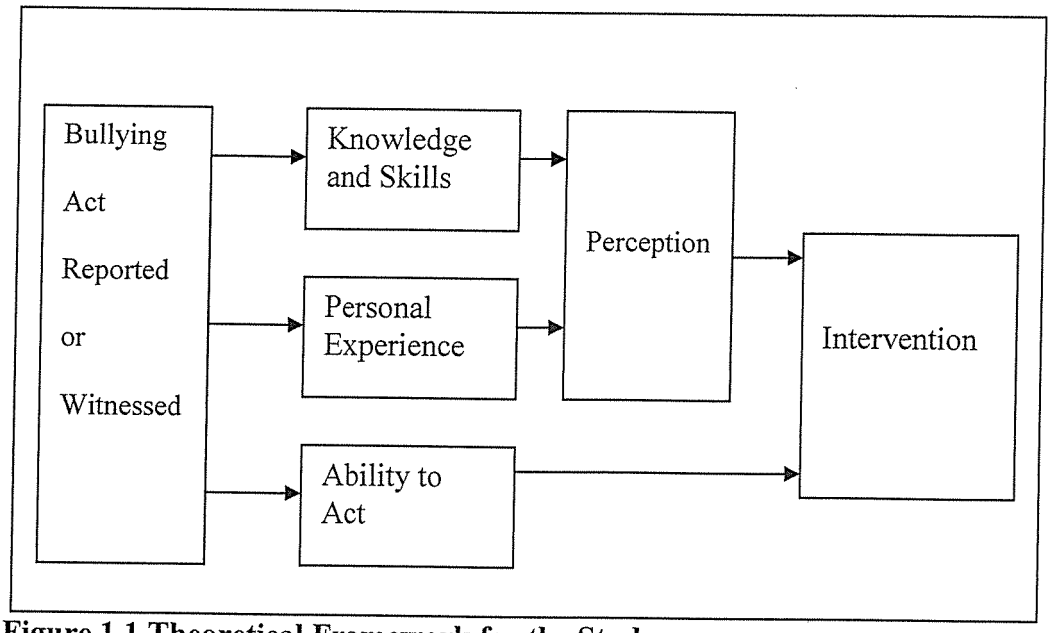


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework for the Study

Figure 1 illustrates that each person brings with them personal factors that have the potential to influence their response to bullying behaviour. The teacher's intervention in response to a bullying incident is expected to be influenced in the first place by either witnessing or hearing a report of an occurrence of a bullying act. The teachers' knowledge and understanding about bullying, the skills that he/she possesses, his/her personal past experiences of bullying will influence their perception of bullying, its severity and the need for intervention. Directly influencing the intervention process is the ability teachers are given as part of their role to respond to instances of bullying. As employed professionals, teachers are provided with the ability and authority to appropriately intervene to witnessed or reported incidents of bullying occurring within the school precinct.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was based on a relatively small sample, being limited to one public primary school in New South Wales. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise to the Australian population from this sample.

Also, the findings from this study can only be expected to be as accurate and reliable as the students and staff provided truthful responses to the questionnaires and focus group questions. Therefore, responses and results are assumed to be accurate unless responses suggest otherwise.

Overview of Thesis

For ease of interpretation, the structure of this thesis has been divided into chapters in order to for the reader to easily locate the results of the study, the review of the relevant literature and relevant discussion points. The current chapter outlines the background to the study, the purpose of the study and overall significance of the study, provides a theoretical framework, and identifies the delimitations of the study, as well as an outline for the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2 surveys the relevant literature and defines the pertinent terms. A definition of bullying is provided together with identification of issues surrounding the prevalence of bullying and teacher awareness of peer-victimisation in past studies.

The research methods employed to undertake the current study are present under the heading Methodological Framework in Chapter 3. This chapter also outlines how the analysis of results was undertaken.

Chapter 4 describes the results and the findings from the analysis It focuses particularly on identifying discrepancies between responses gained from students and their teachers. It also identifies where common responses have been obtained from both staff and students, thus indicating the awareness staff members have into the level of bullying.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings from both the teacher and student surveys. It discusses the results and methodologies employed. Chapter 6 provides recommendations for further studies on bullying to help address issues found in this investigation. Finally it outlines the benefits of the present study, not only to the school in which the research was conducted, but also to other Australian primary schools. This aims to further develop the awareness of the prevalence of peer-victimisation in schools and the seriousness that results from of a lack of understanding by teachers of the circumstances in which students find themselves.

In summary Chapter 1 has introduced the topic and provided an overview of the thesis. Chapter 2 will focus more specifically on the literature review including definitions of bullying, the history of bullying in research, and will examine past studies that are relevant to the present study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the present study is to examine the discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in an Australian primary school. Related bodies of literature explored as a basis for the study were: general history of bullying research with a focus on literature relating to the incidence of bullying and the methodologies used to assess these levels, definitions and types of bullying, consequences of bullying, types of people affected by bullying, bullying prevalence, monitoring the level of bullying in the school precinct, and literature relating to student-teacher perceptions of bullying.

History of Bullying Research

Primary school children have suffered at the hands of bullies for many years before it became a prominent area of interest for researchers. The issue of bullying was minimised and passed off as teasing, a joke or simply playing a prank. Numerous studies have been conducted in this area since the 1970s throughout Scandinavia under the leadership of Dan Olweus (Olweus, 1994).

Studies in Australia began to emerge throughout the 1990s and have continued in great depth since that time (Rigby, 2003). Professor Ken Rigby has been a prominent researcher and prolific writer on the topic of bullying and its prevalence in primary schools. Rigby has provided evidence-based approaches to reduce bullying within schools after having identified a need, by conducting in-school studies and peer-relationship questionnaires (Rigby, 2008; McGrath & Noble, 2006). The results of

his studies are used in research today to estimate the numbers of students being bullied and the ever-increasing need to implement preventative measures (Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004).

What is Bullying?

In the past bullying was often minimised and passed off as teasing, a joke or simply playing a prank. Numerous studies have been conducted in this area since the 1970s throughout Scandinavia under the leadership of Dan Olweus (Dan Olweus Research Centre, 2001).

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Traditionally bullying was seen as acceptable and normal behaviour exhibited by children. It was perceived as innocent childs-play and banter, with the consequence that little was done by teachers to stop it (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). This situation was common across many countries. Little was done about bullying until serious consequences unravelled and, in extreme cases, innocent children took their own

lives (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 1). For example, in Norway a fourteen year old boy committed suicide after he was continually tormented by fellow classmates. It was only then that attention was focused on the impact of bullying on children as a problem within the school precinct (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 1).

Views of what constitutes bullying have changed in recent times. Narrow definitions that focused on bullying as merely physical aggression have been replaced in contemporary times by considerably expanded definitions.

Since the 1970's, with researcher Dan Olweus leading the way, it is obvious that bullying in the school precinct has come to be understood as an immense societal issue. Studies have identified negative affects on students (Rigby, 2003, p. 583-389) including health conditions, low psychological well-being, poor social adjustment, psychological distress and physical illness (Rigby, 2003, p. 583-389). While the range of consequences of peer-victimisation can be severe, other factors to be considered include: the number of students who are victims of bullying; how often these students are bullied; and what teachers really think about bullying. Without support and intervention from educators and others in the school precinct, the problem of bullying will only continue to rise. In addition, past studies have shown that teachers often underestimate the number of students who are bullied, making it less likely for appropriate intervention to occur (Bradshaw, O'Brennan and Sawyer, 2007).

Definitions of Bullying

Olweus developed his definition of bullying over time and ultimately developed it into a definition that is still commonly used today by many researchers. Olweus (1994) defines bullying as being "when a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons."

Rigby's definition differs slightly to that of Olweus and states that bullying is "the systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relationships" (Rigby, 2008). This abuse of power described by Rigby may be influenced by a child's age, size, strength, attitude and personality (Rigby, 2008). While this definition mentions an abuse of power it does not adequately define the type of behaviours constituting bullying and therefore appears to fall short of a sufficiently detailed definition to describe bullying.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006) utilised the "Bullying No Way" definition which states that, "bullying is repeated behaviour by either a group or an individual where an abuse of power takes place."

Thus, one common element in the various definitions described by the literature is a relationship with a power imbalance in which negative actions occur repeatedly. The fact that peer-victimisation might happen to an individual either in a group or individual situation should be noted. In considering the points of all the definitions and contexts of bullying, three core elements become evident, namely, power, frequency and the intent to harm.

It is also important to recognise and note that bullying is not the same as conflict, violence or disagreement. One can easily argue or disagree with another person where no power imbalance is evident. Therefore in a case such as this, bullying does not occur if both parties involved share equal power during the incident. Alternatively, bullying may, in fact, involve all three behaviours, conflict, violence and a disagreement. The *Bullying No Way* website, which was designed recently by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training in an attempt to counter bullying, indicates that one instance that includes a demonstration of power is neither a positive nor a negative. When used positively with everyday life, power can be a very useful tool; it is only when it is used against another person that damage may result (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006).

Bullying may take on many forms. Peer-victimisation may not be intentional and could be carried out without the intent to harm and therefore may not be classified as an act of bullying. On a large scale bullying is defined as being malign or non-malign (Rigby, 2008). Malign bullying involves a "conscious aim to hurt or intimidate" whereas non-malign bullying involves unintentionally hurting or threatening others. In the case of non-malign bullying, once awareness of inappropriate actions is expressed, students are likely to cease undesirable and inappropriate behaviour (Rigby, 2008).

Furthermore, bullying has been continually recognised in literature through a variety of discrepancies. These discrepancies involve describing bullying as being either a direct or an indirect behaviour (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Frydenberg & Lodge,

2005; Dupper & Whitted, 2005; Rigby, 2008). Also outlined in Rigby's work (2008) are the classifications that define direct bullying as behaviour that forthrightly affects another person, where one is directly bullied through open means such as striking, insulting language, or threatening motions (Rigby, 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Alternatively, indirect bullying, involves a more covert approach to bullying, one in which victims are affected by behaviours such as exclusion, the spreading of rumours or the persuasion of others to dislike them (Rigby, 2008).

In the case of direct bullying, two sub-types are commonly exhibited: (a) verbal bullying that includes verbal abuse and/or harassment (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Rigby, 2008) that aims to purposely hurt someone through spoken means; and (b) physical bullying that involves using bodily actions such as hitting, kicking, pushing or punching (Dake, Price, Telljohann & Funk 2003; Rigby, 2008). In both cases a perpetrator acts to intentionally hurt someone using methods that are directly hands-on.

Conversely, indirect bullying occurs when covert actions to control one's socialisation with peers (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). In the case of indirect bullying, perpetrators may use threatening gestures such as body language or eye contact (Rigby, 2008). In enacting this type of bullying, the perpetrator's actions convey that socialisation with the victim is strongly undesired. Effectively this bullying behaviour makes the victim feel uncomfortable through gesture. Other examples of indirect bullying include rumour spreading or convincing others to insult the victim (Rigby, 2008). This type of bullying can also include a deliberate intention to exclude someone from a group or activity (Rigby, 2008).

Rigby (2008 p. 26) has outlined a number of other types of bullying. Developing an understanding for these varying types will illustrate the severity of bullying and its ever-changing nature in contemporary society. Rigby states that the intent of bullying may in fact be of a social nature, meaning that peer-victimisation may be intended to impair social relationships between the victim and other students. This type of bullying has been identified as being *relational* or *social* bullying.

Cyber-bullying is a recent phenomenon that has caught the attention of many researchers and media organisations. The freer access to the Internet, email, and other forms of technology has provided an additional form of communication for bullies to engage in harmful behaviours (Rigby, 2008 p. 26,35). This type of bullying is of particular concern to teachers who, on the one hand, need to teach students to use various technologies, while at the same time these technologies lend themselves to increased access by bullies and assist them to implement their plans of harm to victims.

Much of the bullying occurring within primary schools is documented as being proactive rather than reactive. This indicates that bullying transpires as a result of a desired achievable outcome rather than as a form of retaliation (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

The literature often provides readers with lists of behaviours incorrectly identified as bullying and peer-victimisation behaviours. The act must be, as previously discussed, a negative recurring action from a person or group of persons, with or without the intention of harm, to be considered one of peer-victimisation (Black, Cox & Rigby,

1997; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006). Specific one-off behaviours cannot be identified as peer-victimisation since not all occurrences of the specific behaviour are repeated and include the intent to harm (Rigby, 2008).

A new form of bullying allows children to be victimised within their own homes. Cyber-bullying is rapidly increasing so that students, parents and teachers need to be particularly alert to its forms (Meadows, Bergal, Helling, Odell, et al,. 2005). Cyber-bullying is defined as bullying involving information and communication technologies where an intent to harm others is apparent (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). Contemporary society is a technological world where young people have access to a variety of technologies such as the internet and cell phones. In this environment it is often impossible to trace the source of the ridicule and therefore cyber-bullying becomes an easy way to target others anonymously without teachers' or parents' awareness (Anderson & Sturm, 2007).

Youth or older children are often left alone with the computer and therefore are at greatest risk of being confronted by cyber-bullying. Previously bullied children could use the home as a sanctuary and a means of escape from the bullying they were exposed to at school, but with the development of such technologies cyber-bullying has invaded the home space (Anderson, Sturm 2007). Cyber-bullying, similar to that of other forms of bullying, has consequences similar to other forms of bullying such as low self-esteem, depression and increasing stress levels or in extreme cases, suicide (Meadows, et al, 2005; Kopko, 2006).

Consequences of Bullying

Long-term consequences result for children who are exposed to bullying and repeated peer-victimisation (Woods & Darstadt, 1999, p. 2). It is important to note that the consequences of being exposed to bullying and peer-victimisation differ from one victim to the next. Each person reacts uniquely to their experiences of bullying and therefore a range of consequences results in society. Furthermore, young children are more likely to be affected by both short and/or long term adverse outcomes, both as a victim and perpetrator.

One of the most concerning consequences of bullying was described by Adams and Lawrence (2006) who stated that, by age thirty, 25% of children who exhibited bullying tendencies earlier in their childhood, have acquired a criminal record and have served time in prison. Merrell, Gueldner, Ross and Isava (2008) concurred and suggested that there is a higher chance that bullies, as they age, are more likely to exhibit criminal behaviour and incur a criminal record.

Second, many bullies typically lead relatively aggressive lifestyles which may include aggression towards their own children, a factor which can ultimately lead to the intergenerational transmission of learned bullying behaviour (Adams & Lawrence, 2006). Merrel, Gueldner, Ross and Isava (2008) agreed that children acting as a bully are more susceptible to become abusive and aggressive and influence their children to act in a similar manner. The victims themselves may also develop and mimic the bullying behaviour as a means of resolving their pain, or they may turn in the opposite direction and withdraw themselves from society completely.

Third, cross-sectional surveys have found a variety of health consequences including psychological well-being and social adjustments (Rigby, 2003, p. 583-389) result from bullying. These psychological and psychosomatic consequences have the potential to develop into ongoing traumas that can last throughout the victim's life. Psychological issues associated with bullying also often cause problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, and delinquency (Holt, Finkelhor & Kantor, 2007).

Studies also have been conducted into the relationship regarding between bullying and health to determine whether or not health problems existed before the bullying occurred, or conversely whether the bullying caused the health problems. Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels and Verloove-Vanhorick (2006) suggested that some symptoms pre-existed prior to bullying, while other health problems developed as a result of victimisation. The authors proposed that pre-existing health problems may create a vulnerability to be victimised, where as other symptoms such as school avoidance or loneliness arise subsequent to the bullying (Fekkes et al., 2006).

In summary, substantial consequences for victims, bullies, teachers, and society at large result from bullying and where possible these non-trivial consequences should be avoided using all means possible.

Types of People Affected by Bullying

Chapter 1 introduced the types of people who may be affected by bullying and in what role they may be affected.

Table 3. Further Key Roles in Bullying Occurrences

Teacher as victim	Teacher as bully
Teacher as bully	Student as bully
Teacher as bystander	Student as bystander

The previous chapter also highlighted that the types of decisions that both teachers and students make, will depend on their perceptions of the contextual factors, various types of beliefs that they hold, their knowledge about what constitutes bullying and their past experiences of bullying behaviour.

The following section outlines how the bully, victim, victim-bully, the bystander or teacher roles differ and thus are likely to influence students' and teachers' perceptions of bullying.

Bullies

Characteristically bullies are perceived to be physically bigger and stronger than those they are victimising (Black, et al, 1997; Adams & Lawrence, 2006). Bullies are more self-confident and appear to dominate their victims (Black, et al, 1997). Merrell, Gueldner, Ross and Isava (2008) stated that bullies feel that threatening others and the use of violence is an advantageous measure in problem solving. These common stereotypical views may in fact not be the case in reality and various studies have indicated why.

Theories and research studies have been developed that postulate why children become bullies. Suggestions include following adult models of aggressive behaviour, observed in either the media or the family; being rewarded for 'bullying' and aggressive acts and thus leading students to develop the belief that it is socially acceptable, and perhaps even advantageous, to act in this way towards others; finally, bullies themselves may have been treated unfairly and aggressively by someone they know including family members (Adams & Lawrence, 2006) and thus have come to believe that this is normal behaviour. In different contexts, bullying may be undertaken using a variety of different behaviours.

Victims

Customarily victims often have insufficient social skills necessary to associate and interact with others in order to make friends (Black, et al, 1997). The physical weaknesses victims often display allow them to become easy targets.

Two types of victims each portray different characteristics. The first type, the passive-aggressive victim, has low anger level. They do little to provoke their attacker and do not attempt to defy the bully (Adams & Lawrence, 2006). Reactions commonly include crying or withdrawing (Adams & Lawrence, 2006).

The second type of victim, known as the high-aggressive victim, depicts aggressive emotions towards their attackers and is inclined to fight back when bullied. This type of victim creates tension with others. These victims often have intellectual disabilities affecting their social aptitude, meaning that social cues and socially acceptable

behaviours are underdeveloped and need to be developed (Adams & Lawrence, 2006). However, not all children with disabilities are victims of bullying, a fact which supports the notion that personal characteristics may also determine the outcome of peer-victimisation (Adams & Lawrence, 2006).

It is generally agreed that victims hold three common qualities that incline them towards being bullied (Adams & Lawrence, 2006, p. 2). These characteristics include: rewarding bullies with concrete materials such as money or belongings; providing intangible rewards such as showing emotion and anguish; and often not reporting the bullying incident that occurs (Adams & Lawrence, 2006, p. 2).

Victim-Bullies

Some students who have experienced peer-victimisation go on to become a bully themselves. This sequence of events is thought to be the result of learning bullying behaviour as a result of being a victim and feeling that their only way to gain control of a situation is to target others (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, [n.d] p. 7). Other studies have found that these victim-bullies are often the least amiable and the least likely to succeed in school (Key Information from the Literature about Bullying [n.d] p. 7).

Bystanders

By far the greatest proportion of students are involved in bullying as neither the victim nor the bully, but are witness to occurrences of peer-victimisation (Adams &

Lawrence, 2006). Bystanders are often confronted when they witness an occurrence of bullying and feel unsure as to whom they should side with. If they support the bully, they themselves become a bully. If they aid the victim they may expose themselves to becoming a target of the same peer-victimisation. The dilemma is further exacerbated if they stand on the sidelines as witnesses, they experience feelings of guilt (Fried & Fried, in Adams & Lawrence, 2006). A study conducted by Craig and Atlas (2000) revealed that peers witness as many as 85% of bullying incidents (Frydenberg & Lodge, 2005). While these characteristics have been found by researchers to be common in the roles undertaken during a bullying episode, it must be understood that these are simply common trends that have emerged through studies and therefore do not define exactly what constitutes a bully, victim or victim-bully.

It is apparent from Figure 2 that victims are affected by each participant during a bullying incident. Bullies always directly impact the victim. By contrast the impact of bystanders may be direct or indirect depending on the option they choose in either assisting victims or witnessing the bullying event. The impact these two options has on a victim could cause the victim to himself or herself become a bully. Thus, each person plays a major role in the outcome.

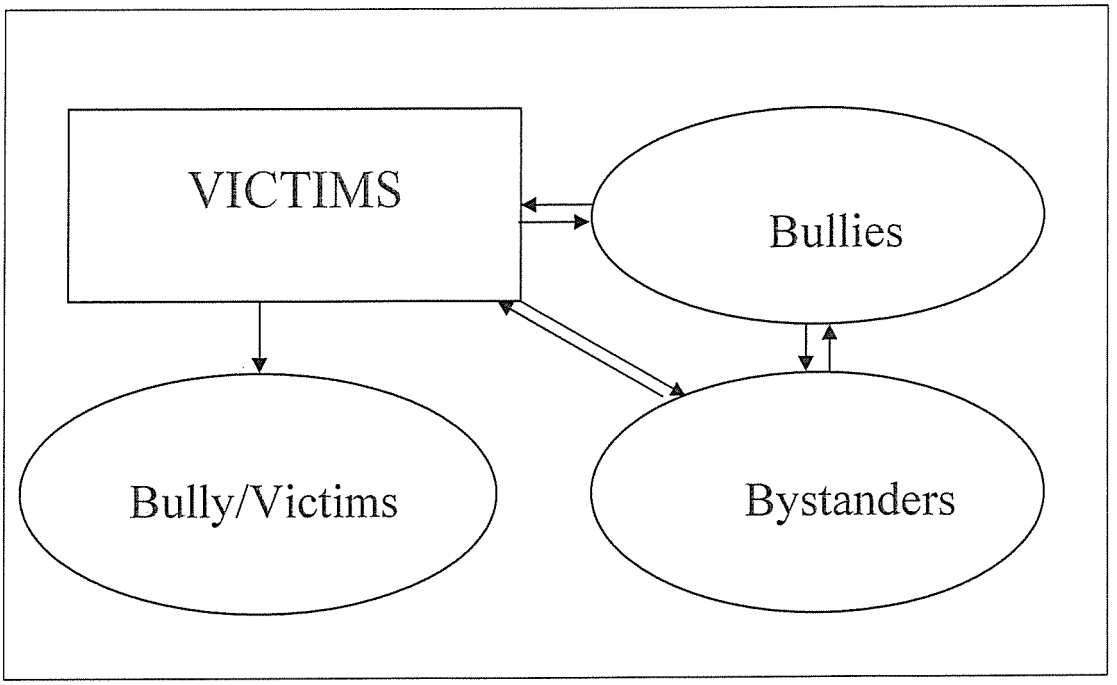


Figure 2.1 Understanding the Bully-Victim Relationship

Monitoring Bullying in Schools

The variety of definitions of bullying used by teachers, researchers and students influences the information about the prevalence of bullying (Frisen, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008). This situation, therefore, makes it difficult to assess the veracity of research regarding the identification of bullying and during the intervention process. Varying definitions also impact perceptions of the severity of bullying. Educators may perceive an incident as less serious than that of a student and therefore act in a way that appears inadequate to the student. This situation leads to a variety of views and understandings of bullying that are individual (Frisen, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008).

Students have the right to feel safe and supported at school and this requirement together with the widespread occurrence of bullying in schools, has led to the call for mandatory implementation of anti-bullying policies. These policies aim to develop

students' understanding of the different types of bullying, and to teach socially appropriate behaviour (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006, p. 2).

As stated by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2006) all Australian public schools must employ strategies to effectively prevent and deal with bullying. These strategies need to be taught and frequently reinforced so students are aware of the differences between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006). Each school is to develop their own discipline policy and compatible anti-bullying policy. Policies should be regularly reviewed to ensure effectiveness. Renewal or redesign may be appropriate after investigating the extent of bullying in schools (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006).

Teachers in all primary schools have a responsibility to not only help students become life long learners but also to ensure that behaviour management problems are handled with care and competence. Developing appropriate social skills is a basic goal of education and aims to assist students to be an active member of both the school and the wider community (Beran, 2006). There are various ways in which schools can monitor and become aware of the level of bullying within their school. Methods to assess and monitor bullying include; self-reporting scales and surveys, peer and teacher nomination tasks, and observation of behaviour (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 4).

Self-reporting scales and surveys ask students to indicate the amount and types of behaviours associated with bullying. Scores are created and common grounds and responses are met. This is the most common type used in schools due to ease of use

as a data collection tool (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 4). *Peer and teacher nomination tasks* hold more legal and ethical consequences so are often left to a researcher to conduct. Teachers nominate students from their class who demonstrate certain characteristics. These children are then targeted for intervention programs. Nominated students can be either bully or victim (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 4). *Behavioural observations* occur in everyday settings and provide a convenient method for collecting data on the frequency of bullying within the school setting (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 4).

It becomes somewhat of a challenge for teachers to detect and monitor bullying in schools. Bullies can be cunning and calculating and carefully plan a time and place for peer victimisation to take place (Beran, 2006, p. 2). This means that much of the bullying that takes place occurs covertly; ensuring teachers do not know of its occurrence and therefore preventing intervention from taking place (Watts, 1997).

Anti-bullying programs in schools differ greatly from each other. All employ different strategies and techniques and the success (or otherwise) of programs differs from school to school, as each school has a variety of needs and unique contextual variables and constraints (Dupper & Whitted, 2005). The most highly recommended approach is the 'whole school approach' in which the entire school is encompassed by strategies, class and individual strategies (Woods & Darstadt, 1999; Dake et al., 2003).

Prevalence of Bullying in Schools

Numerous studies have been undertaken to assess the prevalence of bullying in primary schools in Australia over the past two decades. According to Rigby (1997), one in six children are exposed to bullying on a weekly basis. This is a relatively high level compared to that of other countries (Rigby, 1997) in which present percentages varying from 8% in Toronto to 18% in Zimbabwe (Bidwell, [n.d]). The present statistics indicate a need for further support for schools in addressing and countering bullying.

Although bullying is an old phenomenon, it is only recently that it has been identified as an issue of serious concern, the topic of much research, and as a social issue to be addressed before it harms children. Over the past five years, numerous studies have been undertaken in Australia providing data from students in both primary and secondary schools regarding bullying (e.g., Rigby, 1997). In Rigby's study, 26,000 students completed the Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ). This questionnaire is still available for use and may be used to provide up-to-date statistical information for schools on bullying prevalence. Other questionnaires developed and conducted throughout the nineties elucidate information about the types of bullying occurring as well as student perceptions of bullying prevalence (Watts, 1997). Within Australia, verbal bullying is documented as the most common form of bullying (Rigby, 1997).

Despite prevalence questionnaires, it remains a difficult task to determine the exact number of students bullied in primary school within any country. Children are often too reluctant to tell others if they are being bullied and Rigby (1997) suggests that, if students do tell of experiences, teachers are not the first people children will confide

in when exposed to peer victimisation. His study revealed that both boys, 52.9% and girls, 64.0% aged 8-12 prefer to talk to their mother about bullying problems than their teacher (boys 34.0%, girls 43.4%) (Rigby, 1997, p. 5).

Teachers do consider bullying to be a serious issue in schools, and Dake et al., (2003) consider it to be the second most serious issue after drug use. Teachers often feel they lack the knowledge to adequately deal with bullying (Dake et al., 2003). Craig and Pepler (1997) stated that there are a number of reasons why teachers only intervene in 4% of bullying cases. Incidences may be overlooked or seen as a childhood game, or behaviours may stop as teachers come into view to avoid punishment. Intervention in bullying episodes tends to differ among school staff due to their experiences and perception of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

Australian research has produced results similar to those of other countries including Canada, Scandinavia, Ireland and England (New South Wales Department of Education and Training [n.d]). In 2002, Kids helpline identified bullying as the fourth most common reason children call for advice (New South Wales Department of Education and Training [n.d]). This fact indicates high levels of bullying in schools. Boys are bullied more frequently than girls. Peer-victimisation appears to occur more regularly throughout primary school (Bradshaw et al., 2007) and prevalence declines as schooling progresses (Dake et al., 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2004; Chapell, Hasseiman, Kitchin, & Lomon, et al, 2006).

Educators are inclined to underestimate bullying occurrences in their schools (Bradshaw et al., 2007, p. 1). A recent American study (Bradshaw et al., 2007) asked

students and teachers alike, their view on the prevalence of bullying within their elementary school. Results revealed teachers estimated 18.7% lower than students reported. School staff estimated 15% or less of elementary students' are exposed to peer-victimisation whereas students recorded 33.7% in elementary schools. These results declined throughout middle and high school.

While the prevalence of bullying has produced varying results from different countries, results have been found similar to those of Fekkes et al (2006) study that bullying decreases with age and younger students are more often bullied. Many of the studies have been completed with participants in upper primary and high school (Bradshaw et al., 2007). It is suggested this situation is due to the complexity of studying younger children, and also to locating a study in which reliable results have been achieved (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

The present study was conducted at Year 3 and Year 4 levels of schooling. Year 3 has not been included in previous studies, which have only investigated bullying prevalence in Years 4-12. The study of the prevalence of bullying requires further comparing of students' responses with those of their teachers. This develops a deeper understanding into prevalence rates, and identifies teachers' beliefs about the severity of the problem. One study conducted by Bradshaw et al. (2007) reported that discrepancies between staff and students responses were common. In elementary school, less than 1% of staff indicated results similar to that of their students (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

This chapter has outlined important information derived from the literature on the history of bullying research, definitions of bullying, consequences of bullying for

victims, bullies, victim-bullies, and bystanders. Finally Chapter 2 describes the methods by which bullying is monitored in schools and summarises the existing literature on the prevalence of bullying in schools. Chapter 3 will describe the design of the study and it will outline the procedures undertaken during data collection and analysis and the observance of ethical protocols.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN

Chapter 1 outlined the purpose of the study which is to: identify and describe teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in Years 3 and 4 at one NSW public school; to identify students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the same two classes as reported by students in the classes; to compare the teachers' perceptions of the level of bullying with the students' perceptions; and to use the data to interpret, analyse and understand the various types of information regarding the awareness of bullying from both teacher and student perspectives.

Emanating from this purpose, the research questions guiding the present study were: (a) What are the students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the school precinct in the NSW school investigated? (b) What perceptions of the level of bullying do the teachers of those students hold? (c) What are the similarities and differences between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying?

A mixed method design was selected for the study which consisted of three parts: (a) a written questionnaire completed by students and administered by teachers

b) a written survey completed by the teachers and administered by the researcher;

c) a focus group discussion in which the teachers participated and which was conducted by the researcher.

Participants

The participants were the teachers and students of Year 3 and Year 4 of a NSW public primary school. Surveys were completed by 89 students and 4 teachers. Three teachers took part in the focus groups.

Data Collection

Teachers were present during the completion of the student questionnaire. Students firstly completed a questionnaire which included both quantitative and qualitative components. It was analysed to identify gaps in data. A subsequent questionnaire was completed by students to probe more deeply in some of the areas on the first questionnaire.

Teachers were involved in completing a questionnaire and in a focus group discussion in which similar questions were asked in greater depth, and student results for questionnaires were discussed. The focus group interview was conducted in the teacher staffroom during morning tea break. The focus group was recorded using an audiotape which allowed for easy analysis of data and which could be replayed as needed to gain accurate information and results.

There were no reported ill effects on students who took part in this study.

Methodology

This investigation utilised a mixed method approach to elucidate teachers' and students' perceptions of bullying at one Australian primary public school in New South Wales. Data were gathered through the use of questionnaires and a teacher

focus group. Data were collected throughout April and May 2008 from 87 students and their teachers in Years 3 and Year 4. Participants were chosen based on the assumption that students of this age would be likely to provide truthful answers as opposed to the social influences of their peers. Also, as indicated above in the study by Rigby (2008) Year 4 has demonstrated the highest level of bullying behaviour in Australian schools Year 4-12.

Both students and teachers completed a questionnaire examining their perceptions of the prevalence of bullying at their school. All participants were assured that their anonymity would be maintained throughout the study and that the data that they provided would be kept confidential. The student questionnaire was slightly different to that completed by the teachers, however, where possible, equivalent questions were asked to both groups allowing results to be accurately compared. The questions were based on ideas taken from (Rigby, 1997) and were worded to suit all students' reading ability. A second questionnaire was subsequently completed by students further clarifying and extending results derived from the first questionnaire.

In addition, staff members participated in a focus group that provided them with the opportunity to expand on comments and results derived from the questionnaire.

Observance of Ethical Protocols

Confidentiality of data was maintained so that names of participants are known only to the researcher, and the report of the study contains only non-identifying information in aggregated form. Data were stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer.

A letter from the principal of the school was obtained indicating permission to undertake the study in a public school in New South Wales (see Appendix 7). A copy of the permission request was sent home to the parents by the school requesting permission for their child/ren to participate in the study (Appendix 2). On the permission request was an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and explaining that participation in the study was voluntary, and that their children could withdraw at any time. All participants were informed that they would not be identified in any way and that their names will not be used throughout the publication of this research. Approval from The NSW department of Education and Training was also obtained (Appendix 2).

Data Analysis

Survey data from both students and teachers were collected, reduced and organised for ease of interpretation. The focus group with the teachers was audio-taped, transcribed and analysed for similarities and differences with students' self reported data.

Figure 1 in Chapter 1 provided an illustration of the theoretical framework utilised in the study and which indicates that each person brings with them personal factors that have the potential to influence their response to witnessing or reporting of bullying behaviour. The study analysed both the qualitative and quantitative data to identify the role of knowledge of bullying matters and personal past experiences for their potential to influence the participants' perceptions which in turn are assumed to influence professional and personal decision-making in relation to bullying. Students'

responses and teachers' responses then were compared for similarities and differences in this process.

The questionnaires were analysed separately, and then the results of the focus group were analysed and used to provide supporting data for the results of the questionnaires.

During this chapter the methodology for the study was outlined and it discussed how the data were to be analysed. The following chapter, Chapter 4 is the results section that will discuss the results gained from the employed mixed methods approach discussed in the current chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapters 1 and 2 established the reasons behind this present study and indicated the need for the research in the current Australian context. The previous chapter outlined the design of the study and the questions guiding the study which were: (a) What are the students perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the school precinct in the NSW school investigated? (b) What perceptions of the level of bullying do the teachers of those students hold? (c) What are the similarities and differences between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying?

This chapter presents the results of the study, and first outlines and examines the *students'* perceptions of bullying reported by them in response to the questionnaire administered to them by their teachers (Appendix 4). The chapter then outlines the *teachers'* perceptions of the level of peer victimisation as reported and discussed by them in response to the teachers' questionnaire (Appendix 5) and the focus group discussion (Appendix 6).

A comparison of the similarities and differences between the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the prevalence of bullying will be provided in the discussion later in the chapter. The results of the student survey will be presented first.

Students' Questionnaires

Question 1 on the student survey asked the students to indicate whether or not they believed each of the following options were true or false:

Table 4. Options Available for Question 1 Student Questionnaire

(a) Bullying is just teasing
(b) Some people deserve to be bullied
(c) Only boys are bullied
(d) People who complain about bullies are babies
(e) All bullies have low self-esteem. That's why they pick on other people.

The purpose of the question was to elicit students' definition of bullying, to clarify their understanding regarding several of its sub-types, and to distinguish myths about bullying from a correct understanding of what constitutes bullying. In order to make a correct response to each of the options, students should have circled FALSE on each occasion.

Figure 4:1 summarises the responses of the students who indicated that each of the options was false, and divides the group of students by gender.

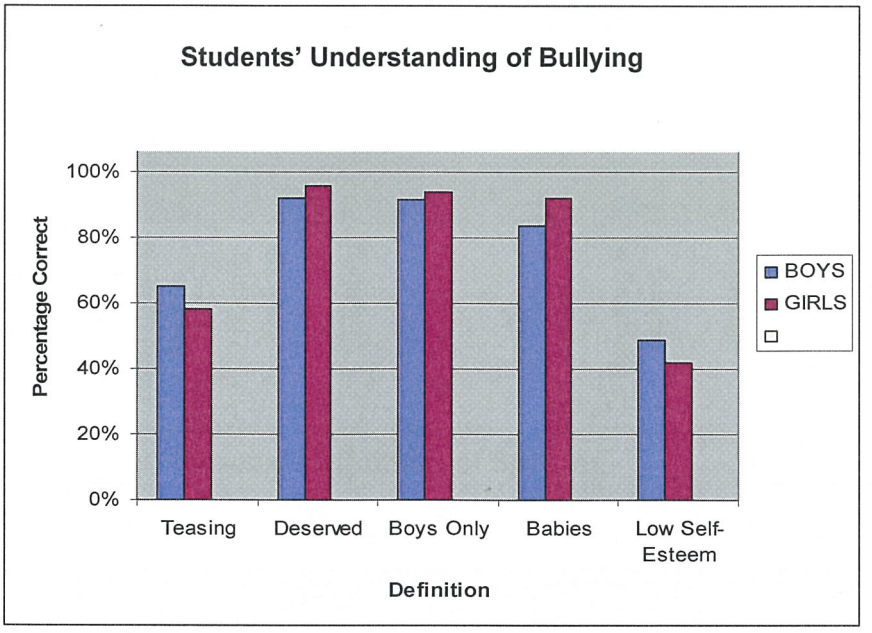


Figure 4.1 Students' Understanding of Bullying

Overall the false responses by boys and girls were similar as seen above in Figure 4.1. More boys than girls indicated that bullying can be defined as 'just teasing'; while more girls than boys thought it was deserved; that more girls than boys thought people who complain about bullying were babies; and that more boys than girls thought the cause of bullying was low-self esteem. However, these differences by gender are not considered significant. Approximately 40% of the whole group thought that bullying behaviour comprises of 'just teasing'; approximately 12% of the whole group thought that some people deserve to be bullied, only boys are bullied; and people who complain about bullying are babies.

Question 2 asked students, "What do you think bullying another person or group really means?" The purpose of this question was to encourage students to write their personal definition of bullying.

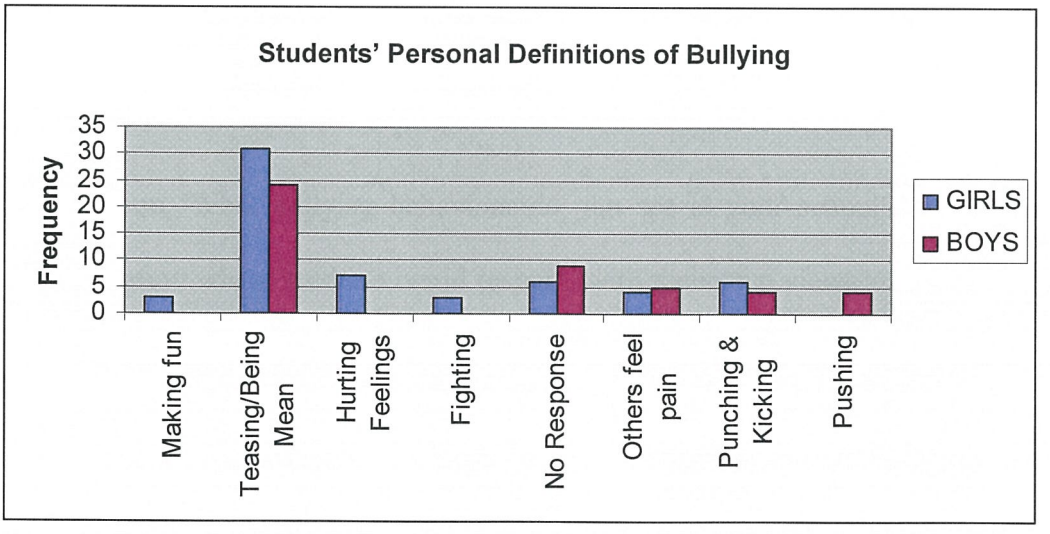


Figure 4.2 Students' Personal Definitions of Bullying

Many of the same responses appeared as in Question 1. However, by far the most common response to this item was the identification of teasing and being mean as the most common personal definition of bullying offered by the students.

Question 3 provided students with a list of various types of behaviours, allowing them to identify the types they had witnessed within their school precinct by ticking a box. Students were also given three blank lines to allow them the opportunity to add other behaviours that they may have observed.

Table 5. Options Available for Question 3 Student Questionnaire

What kind of behaviour do you see at your school? Tick any of the examples you have seen around your school and then add some of your own examples. The first one has been done for you.
a. Spitting on someone b. Calling someone a mean name c. Asking or demanding money d. Ignoring a new student e. Hitting or kicking f. _____ g. _____ h. _____

The question 'What bullying behaviour do you see at your school?' was an open ended question where students could respond with their own views and no limitation was given. During the analysis common responses were recorded and given a percentage value. Responses to this question are summarised in Figure 4:3.

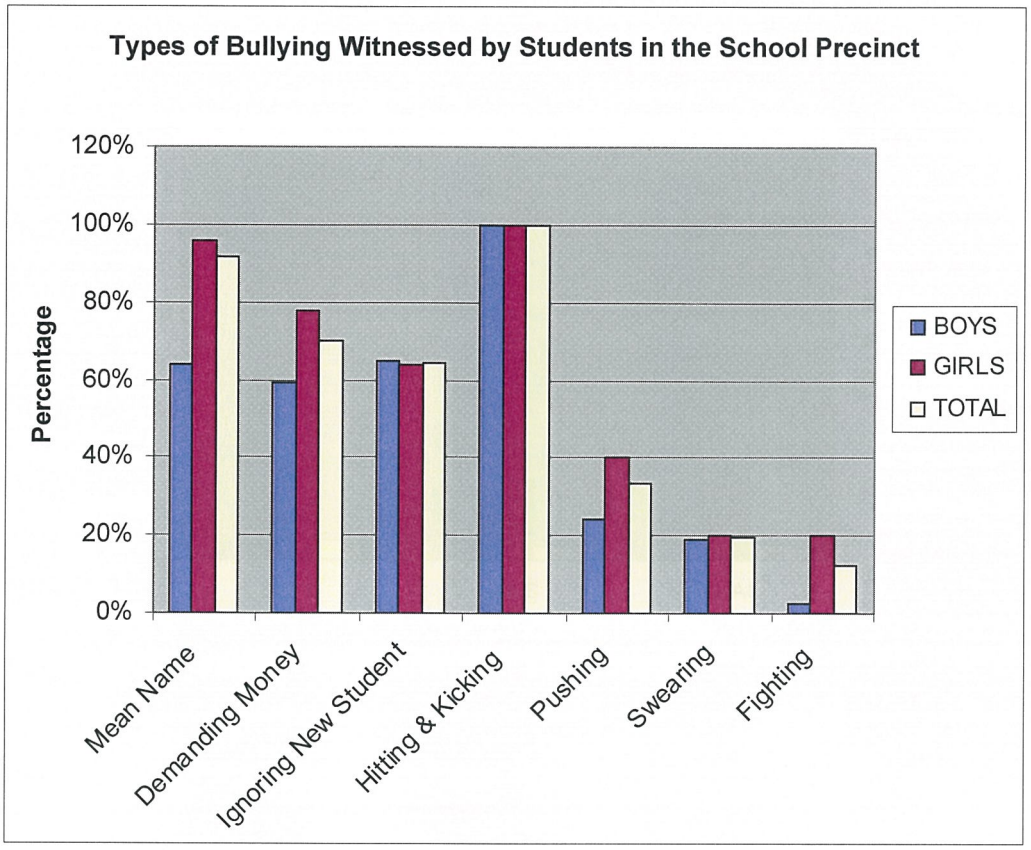


Figure 4.3 Types of Bullying Witnessed by Students in the School Precinct

Responses of note were that 100% of the students, both boys and girls had witnessed hitting and kicking; considerably more girls than boys indicated that they had observed calling other people a mean name; and the three most common other types of behaviours offered by students were pushing, swearing and fighting.

Question 4 asked students if they have ever been bullied themselves. The rationale for the question relates to previous studies conducted within Australia which indicated that 1 in 6 students report to the exposure of bullying (Rigby 1997). This equates to an average of 16.6%.

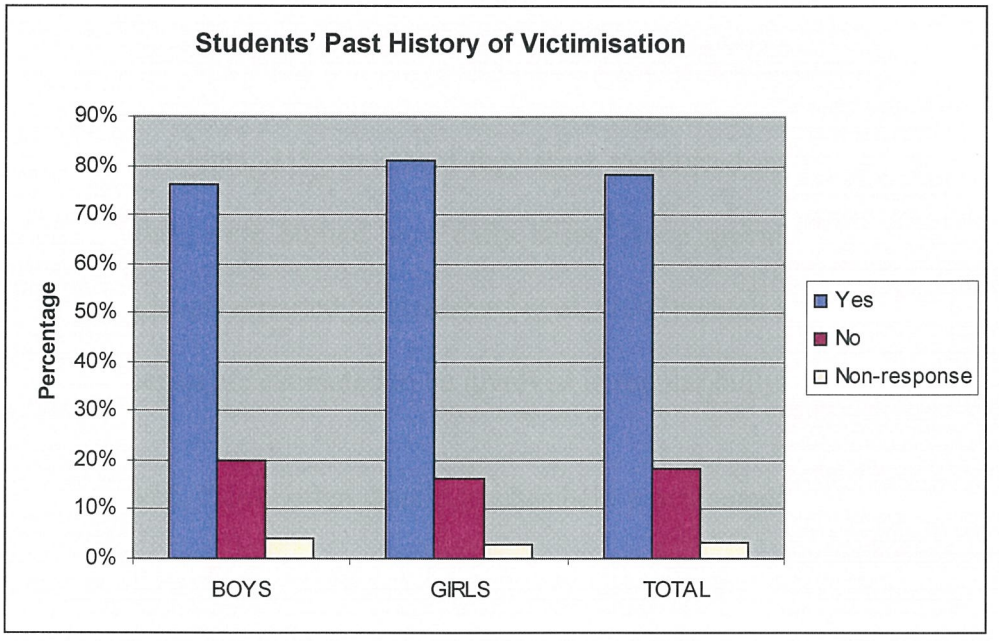


Figure 4.4 Students' Past History of Victimisation

The numbers of students in the present study indicating that they perceived that they had been bullied are much higher than the 16% expected. Of the Year 3 and Year 4 students, 76% of the boys and 81% of the girls indicated that they had been bullied with an overall total of 78%. There are two possible reasons for this higher than expected result. One is that Year 4 students in previous studies have been shown to be the group with the highest prevalence of bullying and the prevalence of bullying in Year 3 is unknown since previous studies have omitted this Year level. Therefore, it may be that bullying prevalence is even higher in Year 3 than it is in Year 4. Another possible reason may be that students' personal definitions of bullying were not exact enough and they reported as bullying even those instances which more properly should be reported as an argument, an altercation, a conflict or some other term. This latter hypothesis is supported by other data in this study which found that 35.6% of the students or were not bullied *regularly*.

While this finding may indicate that the prevalence levels are lower than first thought, still 64.4% of the students in the group are exposed to weekly bullying. Of the remaining students, 31% indicated they were victimised one day per week and 9% indicated they were bullied on a daily basis. These prevalence levels are then consistent with levels reported by Bradshaw et al. (2007) which indicated that 30% of students in America are estimated to be involved in regular bullying incidences.

Question 5 asked, "How often does a teacher help when someone is being bullied? Always, sometimes or never? Figure 4.5 summarises the students' responses and indicates that the majority of students felt they could expect teachers to respond to requests for assistance with bullying.

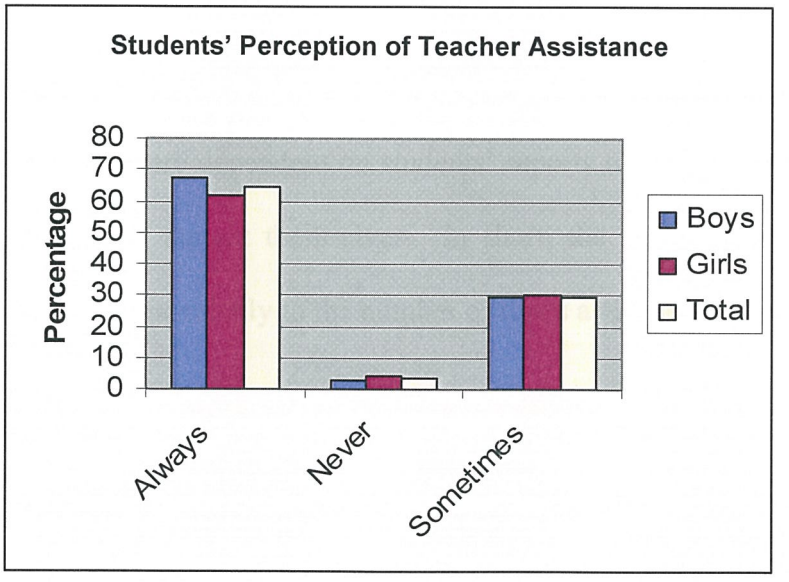


Figure 4.5 Students' Perception of Teacher Assistance

The majority of students (64%) indicated that they felt teachers always intervened during bullying. This is a high percentage given that only 71% indicated that they reported bullying. It is also worthy of note that only 3.4% of students felt that teachers did not provide assistance during peer victimisation incidents.

This result is consistent with data obtained from the teachers' focus group in which the standard procedure for responding was described by Analise (118):

> *We sort of talk to both students about it and if we can't sort it out we make them write it down and refer it on to an executive who sort of has a bit more time because they are off class and they sit them down and talk with them about it. They read the witness accounts of each student and they sort it out with them but if it's something small we just sort it out in class.*

These and other responses indicated that teachers were confident that they dealt with bullying incidents on most occasions. They felt the problem was adequately dealt with when it was reported and often discussed bullying as a class problem, identifying the issue at hand and not specifically those involved. In this way other students could see examples of bullying and inappropriate behaviour.

These are relatively positive results for an intervention remembering that teachers in most cases are dependent on students' reports of bullying particularly when they do not witness the act themselves. In short, the students' responses to this question correspond positively to the number of times a teacher is informed of an incident.

Question 9 asked students to indicate their perception of the characteristics of bully perpetrators. The question was phrased as follows: "The bullies at my school are: (a) popular with other students; (b) feared by other students; (c) disliked by other students.

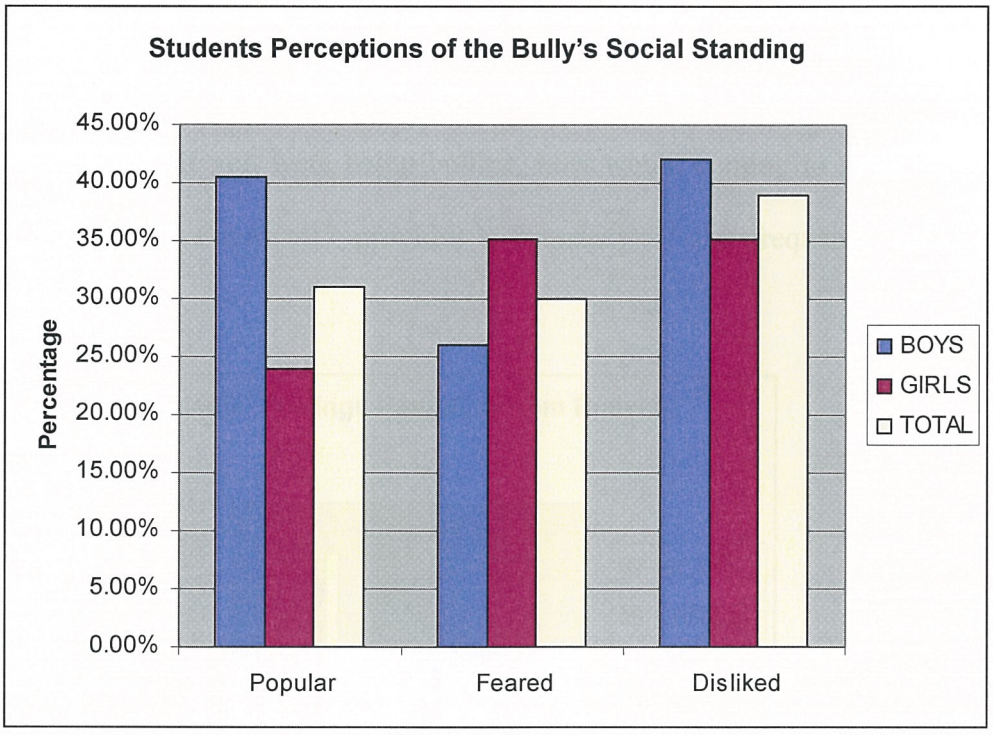


Figure 4.6 Students' Perceptions of the Bully's Social Standing

The rationale for this question was to identify the social role that bullies occupy within the school community. Overall 31% of respondents indicated that bullies are popular from which it could be inferred that they are high on the social ladder. A similar number (30%) indicated that bullies are feared, and 39% indicated that they are disliked.

In reflection of these responses, on the one hand the question might be asked if 'popular' students are associated with bullying, is the idea portrayed that bullying is acceptable and even 'cool'? On the other hand, a greater number of bullies are disliked by other students, and thus the question could be asked, could bullying behaviour exhibited by the perpetrator develop as a result of being disliked by other students?

Question 10 was an open ended question that allowed students to provide personal responses as to how they would feel about coming to school if they were bullied. The question asked: "If you were being bullied, how would coming to school each day make you feel?" Figure 4:7 provides a summary of the frequency of common responses.

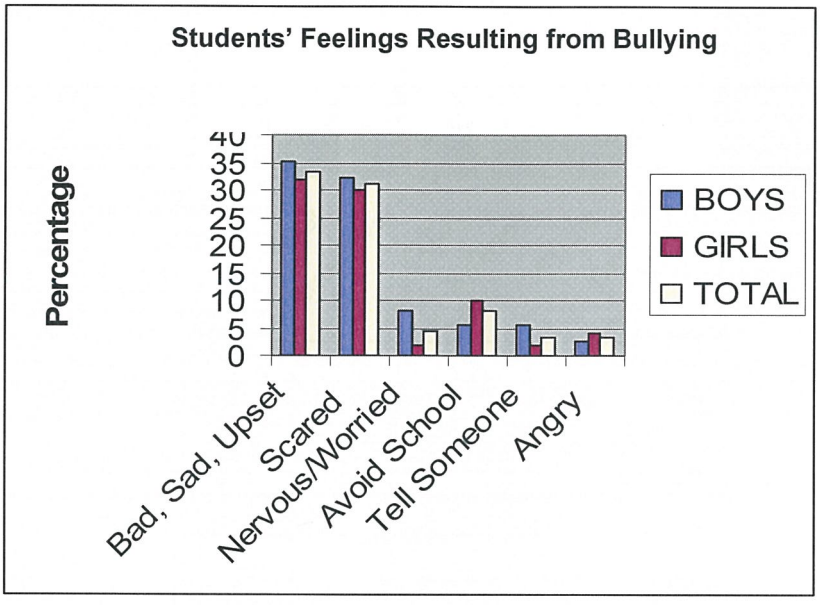


Figure 4.7 Students' Feelings Resulting from Bullying

From the responses in Figure 4.7 it is evident that the most common feelings that students thought they would feel as a consequence of being bullied were negative, and likely to result in harmful psychological consequences. Bad, sad, upset, scared feelings prolonged over a period of time could be assumed to have harmful effects on health, learning, relationships and personal development.

Question 11 asked students to identify the place that bullying most commonly occurs in the school precinct. It stated, "If you or someone you know is bullied where does this bullying most often happen? For example, in the playground, by the toilet block. This question provided an opportunity for students to write down appropriate areas

within their school precinct where bullying occurs. Students could identify more than one area and therefore totals may be greater than 100%.

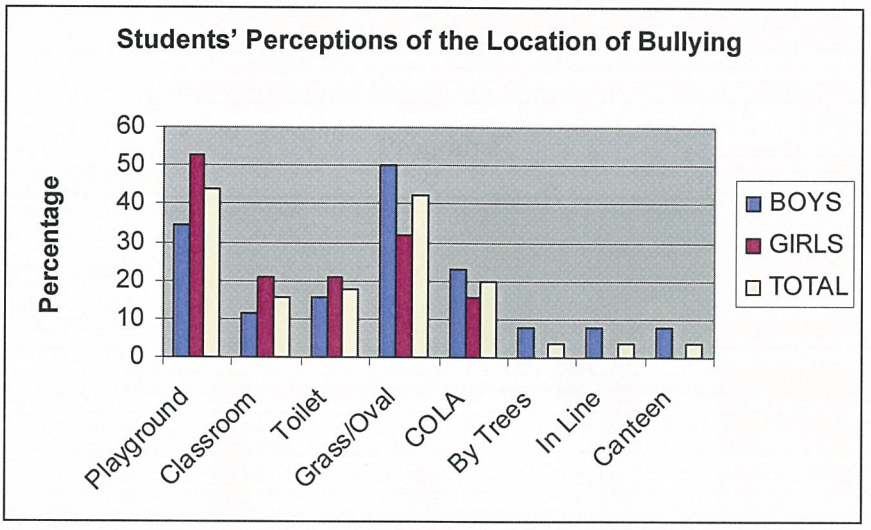


Figure 4.8 Students' Perceptions of the Location of Bullying

Many studies on bullying have found that one of the most common locations for bullying to be reported is the playground (Whitney & Smith, 1993). The findings of the present study are consistent with those with 42% of participants indicating that overall the playground is the most common precinct of the school to be bullied. Also, by extension, the oval shares common characteristics such as reduced supervision, large numbers of congregating students and less structure. Similarly the Covered Learning Area (COLA) shared the same characteristics. When these three locations are aggregated, the total responses were linked and taken as one playing area, and the other response being under the cola, which in schools refers to a covered playing area usually located on asphalt in the school playground. Percentages in order identified 42% on the oval, 42% on the oval and 20% under the COLA.

Question 12 asked students, "Do you have activities in class that teach you about bullying and the right way to treat your classmates? Yes, sometimes, no." Figure 4.9 indicates that most students indicated that they had these lessons 'sometimes'.

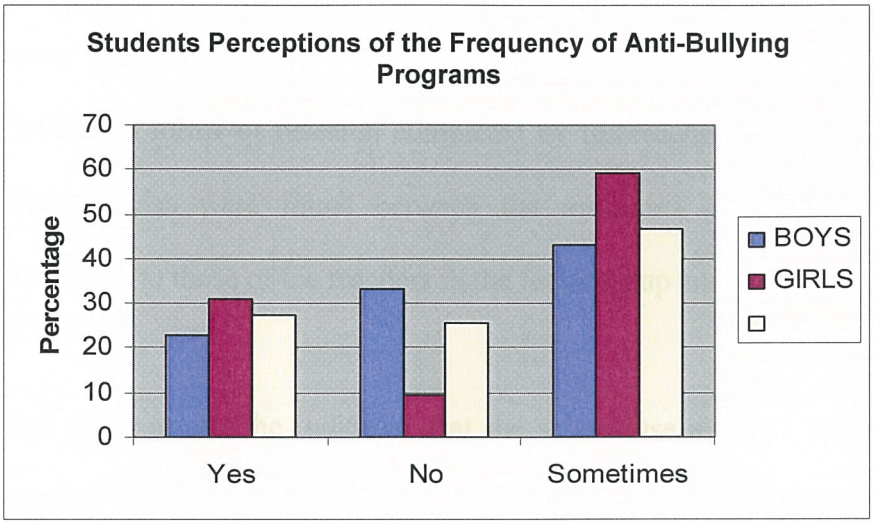


Figure 4.9 Students Perceptions of the Frequency of Anti-Bullying Programs

Both students and teachers were asked to indicate the frequency of lessons devoted to educating students on bullying and how to treat one another. The rationale for the question was that it is assumed that with more education on this topic, the level of bullying could be expected to decrease. As can be seen from Figure 4.9, students overall felt that only sometimes did they have classroom activities that taught them about bullying. The teachers' responses to the same question revealed similar results with 50% stating that they sometimes provide classroom activities that educate students about bullying. The other 50% of respondents revealed that they did implement activities (it is assumed that a regular basis was intended).

Teachers' Questionnaire and Focus Group Results

Questions from the focus group reiterated those asked in the questionnaire completed by teachers. This approach was undertaken since it was thought that the repetition of questions might help to gain more accurate results and responses. The data gathered from both forms of research completed by the teachers emerged as noteworthy, as discrepancies were found between the responses given by the students when compared to those of the teachers in the focus group and questionnaire.

The focus group, the indicated that the school use a whole of school approach to combat bullying. Students learned to interact positively with each other as a means of teaching them to utilise appropriate behaviours when challenged. Teachers were undoubtedly impressed with this approach and believed it helped with inclusion and interaction among students from Kindergarten to Year Six.

This finding is consistent with the literature in which Smith, Pepler and Rigby (2003) consider the whole-of-school approach to bullying is likely to be most effective. The teachers also stated that, subsequent to the bullying questionnaire, the school undertook their peer support program involving grades K-6.

Question 1

Question 1 was designed to elicit teachers' personal definitions of bullying. It was an open-ended question. The teachers' responses indicated that bullying behaviour encompasses unacceptable and anti-social behaviour. During the focus group specific bullying behaviours were drawn upon, examples of behaviour types include:

physical, verbal and exclusion. This question provided an overall specific identification of bullying and a common understanding between staff members. Teachers responses were general and simply outlined behaviour types that comprise bullying.

Question 2

Question 2 incited teachers to evaluate their own perception of bullying prevalence, personal response to that perception, self-efficacy, and willingness to act in bullying cases.

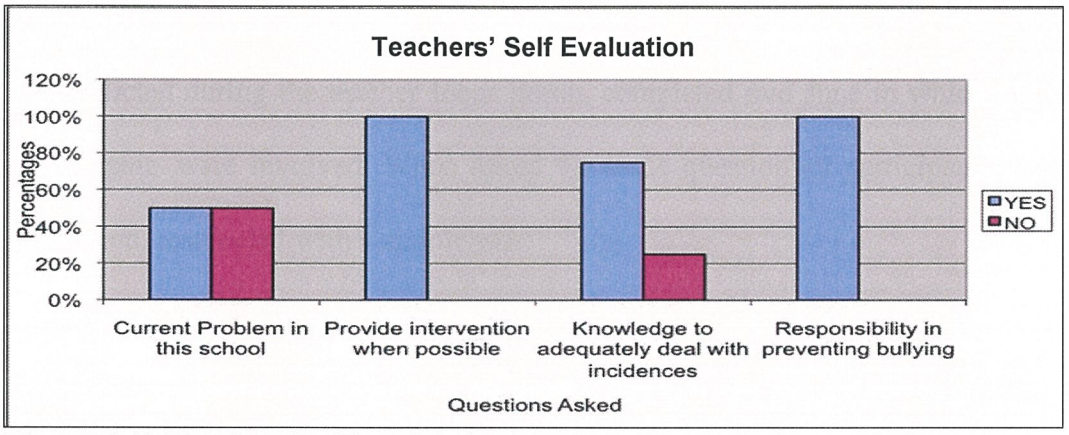


Figure 4.10 Teachers' self evaluation

In response to Question 2a half of the teachers perceived that bullying was an issue in the school while the other 50% perceived that no bullying problem was currently present. As stated earlier, research completed by Rigby (1997) reported that 1 in 6 (or 16%) children are bullied on a regular basis. However as noted in Figure 4.4, 76% of the boys and 80% of the girls in the present study indicated than they has been bullied. This result is much higher that the 16% reported by Rigby (1997) and others. In the present study having only 50% of teacher aware of this problem indicates that an underestimation of the prevalence of bullying and is a substantial difference to students' perceptions of bullying prevalence. Two explanations for the discrepant

results previously suggested were that different definitions were held by teachers when compared to students; and Year 3 students have been included in the present study whereas they have not been included in previous studies.

Interestingly, there was a difference to the response teachers gave regarding option (c) identifying their ability to intervene and provide consequence to a bullying incident. The teacher questionnaire completed at the beginning of April, found that teachers (75%) did not feel adequately equipped to intervene during peer victimisation incidents. Teachers' indicated that they felt they lacked the knowledge to sufficiently employ useful techniques during intervention. This was strongly contradicted during the teacher focus group, completed mid June in which the same participants were involved. When asked the same question all participants, without hesitation, responded with a simple *yes*.

In seeking to explain why these responses were different at different times, one possibility may be that the questionnaire was completed in private, whereas the focus group discussion, provided opportunities for the group to be influenced by others' responses. During the focus group the researcher let the teachers answer the questions with minimal involvement from the interviewer to allow spontaneous responses and ultimately gain reliable results. Therefore the discrepancy between these responses was not explored further.

Two possibilities may exist as to why contradicting results were obtained. The first possibility is that, upon completion of the individual questionnaire, teachers were comfortable to respond openly and honestly about their knowledge to intervene,

where as during the group interview it is possible that individual answers are swayed by the response of others. The second possibility is that some time after the questionnaire was administered the whole school undertook a peer support prevention program that required in depth teacher involvement. The involvement in this program by teachers may have in fact directly increased their knowledge on bullying and helped with their skills and confidence to respond with an appropriate intervention, the intervention process. Teachers also mentioned that they were to undertake an in-service program on peer support and bullying at the beginning of Term 3 and this would also help to increase their professional knowledge and prepare them for dealing with further bullying incidents.

Question 3

Question 3 asked teachers to identify how often they perceived children were being bullied.

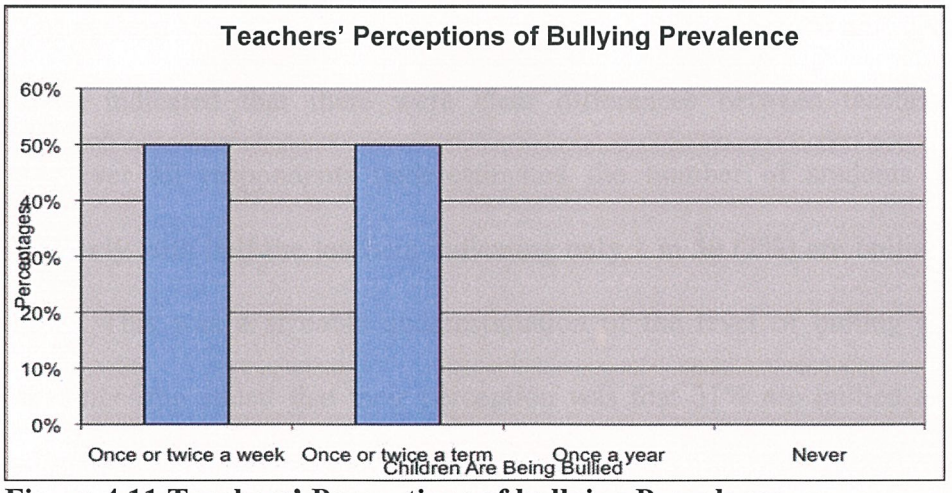


Figure 4.11 Teachers' Perceptions of bullying Prevalence

From Figure 4.11 above it can be seen that 50% of teachers perceived that bullying was occurring at least once or twice a week while the other 50% perceived it is occurring once or twice a term.

During the focus group teachers indicated that bullying incidents within their individual classroom were a problem from time to time. Teachers commented that there were periods during a school term where no incidents are reported but these periods could be followed by a week where a number of bullying problems occur.

On further reflection, this question could have been more clearly phrased to focus on how often teachers received reports of bullying. As it stands, ambiguity regarding whether teachers should report their perceptions of how often individual children were bullied, or their perceptions of the overall numbers of reports.

Question 4

Teachers were asked, in Question 4 to identify the number of students they feel are being bullied on a regular basis, meaning at least once a week. A closed question was asked where respondents were required to tick the box they felt most appropriate. The options were as follows: 1 in 6; 1 in 10; 1 in 15; 1 in 20 and 1 in 50. Results again indicated that there were clear differences between teachers' responses. However all respondents underestimated the number of students being bullied regularly with half the teachers indicating only 1 in 50 (2%) are bullied on a weekly basis. This was a sizeable underestimation of the level of bulling as reported by students who stated that their perception was that 31% are bullied at least once a week. No teachers gave responses a similar to the students' responses. No teachers choose the response 1 in 10, which equated to the responses students' gave to daily peer victimisation. Only 25% of respondents selected a percentage that was comparatively in between students' reports to weekly and daily bullying exposure.

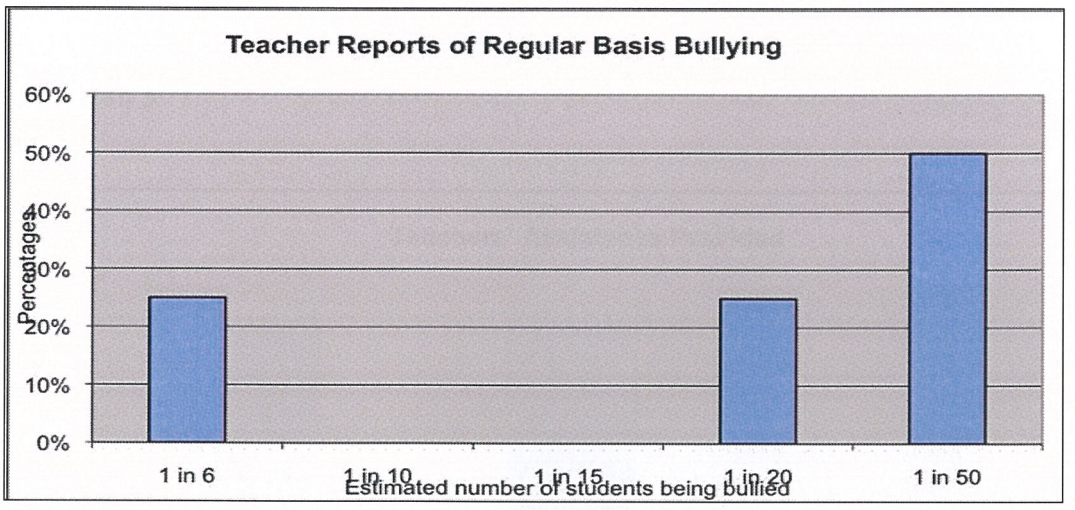


Figure 4.12 Teachers' Perceptions of Repeated Bullying

During the focus group and upon discussion with other teachers the real level of bullying was calculated and indicated at 14%, this still was a considerable underestimation of the level reported by students. It was apparent through discussion during the focus group that teachers were able to better identify the number of students they felt were regularly bullied, however, their results still indicate a large underestimation. It appears that during the discussion and the possible influence of other teachers, individuals may change their responses. As a result a large jump occurred in teachers' estimates of the prevalence of bullying. The underestimation of teachers' perception of bullying prevalence is consistent with other studies completed overseas which, clearly identified a large underestimation (Bradshaw et al, 2007).

Question 5

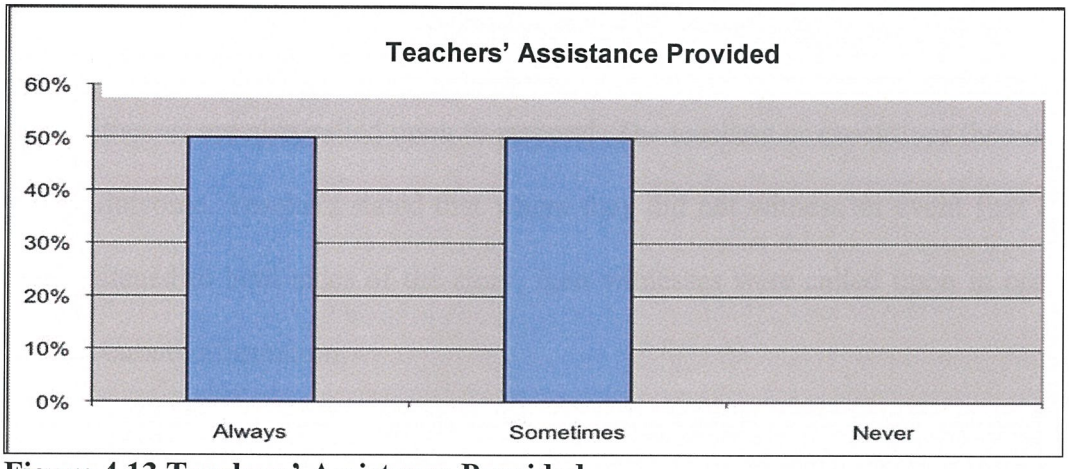


Figure 4.13 Teachers' Assistance Provided

This question was designed to provide a comparison with a similar question asked of the students'. In the teachers' case, half perceived they always intervened in situations intervened while the other half thought teachers intervened sometimes. Students' results were similar to that of teachers, however, their estimate of the rate of teacher intervention was higher. This indicated a good intervention rate.

During the focus group teachers were asked about intervention when they had not actually witnessed an event first hand. Teachers indicated that they were confident they followed reports through investigation and discussion with those involved. Even though a teacher does not always witness a bullying incident first hand does not mean intervention should not take place. Teachers felt it important for consequences to be put in place and for the matter to be followed up. Commonly, "a lot of it [reports of bullying] comes back to the classroom after the playground so you want to sort it out." However, teachers did indicate that they would provide more severe consequences for a bullying incident they had witnessed first hand.

Serious bullying incidences often are referred to an executive within the school, who can then follow it up. Students involved in the incident are expected to verbalise their side of events and then write down exact happenings. These accounts will be read and witnesses are also called upon to respond. The teachers or executives then decide on an outcome. Teachers stated that where they did not witness an event first hand, they listened to both sides of the story, then witnesses were called upon in order to gain accurate information.

The school uses a bullying book in each classroom where students can anonymously write down a bullying incident and teachers, at a later stage will follow up the report. Children have the option of writing a suggested consequence for the bully, a consequence that teachers will consider and When making their final decision. The purpose of the bullying record book is to ensure that the school deals adequately with each problem reported.

Question 6

This question asked, "What are some signs that students are being bullied?" It was designed to allow teachers to write down their understanding of the signs and symptoms that teachers believe are associated with bullying, and which indicate that a child is being bullied. In response teachers provided a number of behaviours, physical and emotional symptoms – a list which correctly identified indicators of bullying and from which teachers would have been able to identify bullying. Their responses indicated being withdrawn, quiet, and attempting to avoid school. Upon analysis of the questionnaire only 25% of responses specified that physical symptoms, such as bruising, cuts and scratches, were also a sign of bullying.

Question 7

Question 7 asked "While in the school grounds is bullying likely to occur?" It was designed to provide an insight into teachers' awareness of common precincts where bullying may occur and whether or not teachers' responses matched students' responses. Respondents for this question provided more than one response in relation to school precinct.

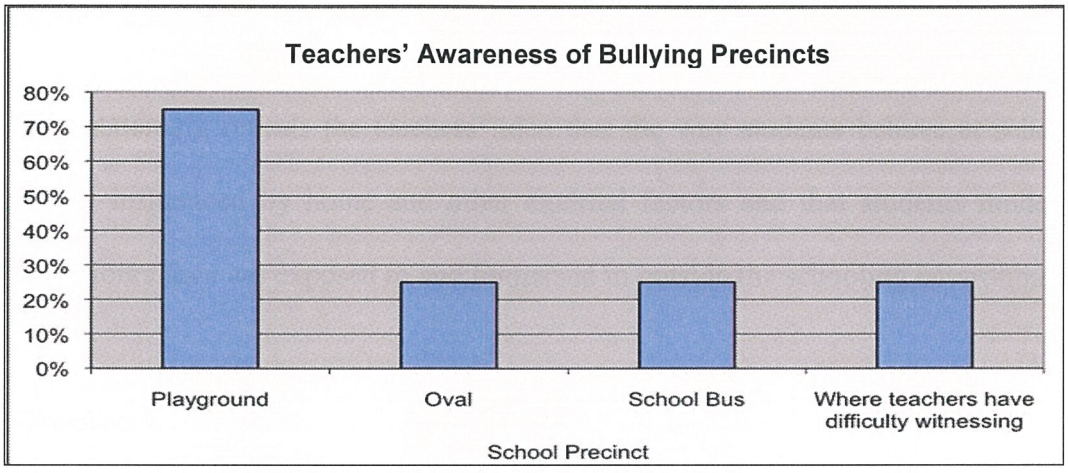


Figure 4.14 Teachers' Awareness of Bullying Precincts

On the survey teachers indicated that they believed the playground was the most likely place in which bullying would occur. Similarly during the focus group teachers indicated that bullying was most likely to occur in the playground. These responses mirrored the responses students gave and was a good indication that teachers were aware of the most likely place for bullying to occur.

The notion that bullying is a covert activity most likely to occur away from the eyes of the teacher in an area where it can occur uninterrupted (Rigby, 2008) was somewhat contradicted during the teacher focus group. Location of bullying was further explored and it was discussed as to why it is believed the playground is the most common place for peer victimisation. The idea was put to teachers by the researcher that it may be because there is less teacher supervision on the playground

and is less likely that all incidents are able to be witnessed. The teachers' responses indicated that they did not believe this to be the case, and stated that there was simply not enough structure for the children in the playground and they "go wild". It is believed that students' behaved this way because,

> *They don't have good social skills and they don't know how to network. A lot of them have [experiences] that are not all that positive in their life so they bring what they have learnt at home to school with them. They don't know how to interact with each other sensibly. (Teacher focus group)*

This statement reveals the teachers' idea that the way students behave at school is highly influenced by home and other external factors and that students model the behaviours they are exposed to and immersed in outside the schooling environment.

Question 8

This question asked "Do you think students would tell you or another teacher if they are bullied? Why? Why Not?" It was asked in order to explore whether or not teachers perceived a large under-reporting problem. All respondents provided responses indicating that *sometimes* students will report bullying incidents to a teacher. Reasons were given as follows:

Teachers felt that students may be afraid to report bullying if they fear the bullying may escalate. Also, students may be embarrassed about drawing attention to themselves, or fear they will upset parents. Alternatively, if students were to *report* bullying it was felt by teachers that this would be in order to provide a consequence for the bully as they want the bullying to cease.

While this may be the case, inconsistent results were obtained from the questionnaire and the focus group. The questionnaire showed that 87.5% of teacher respondents did not feel as though students would tell a teacher if they were being bullying because they were embarrassed, scared or upset. However, the focus group, educators stated that students *would* tell the teacher as "they are all dobbers" and would "straight away tell the teacher". It was further explained by teachers that upon the recent completion of the whole school approach to combat bullying, students are all "very conscious of anti-bullying actions". This may have increased the number of reported bullying incidents and changed their mind so that now they believe students would, in fact, report bullying cases.

Question 9

Teachers were asked to identify whether or not they implemented classroom activities that discouraged bullying behaviours. Figure 4.15 indicates that 50% of teachers said they provided activities in their classroom 'sometimes', while the other 50% stated 'yes' they did. The focus group discussion provided further information that most activities were implemented as past of the peer support program that was run within the school and for one term in each year dedicated itself to anti-bullying activities.

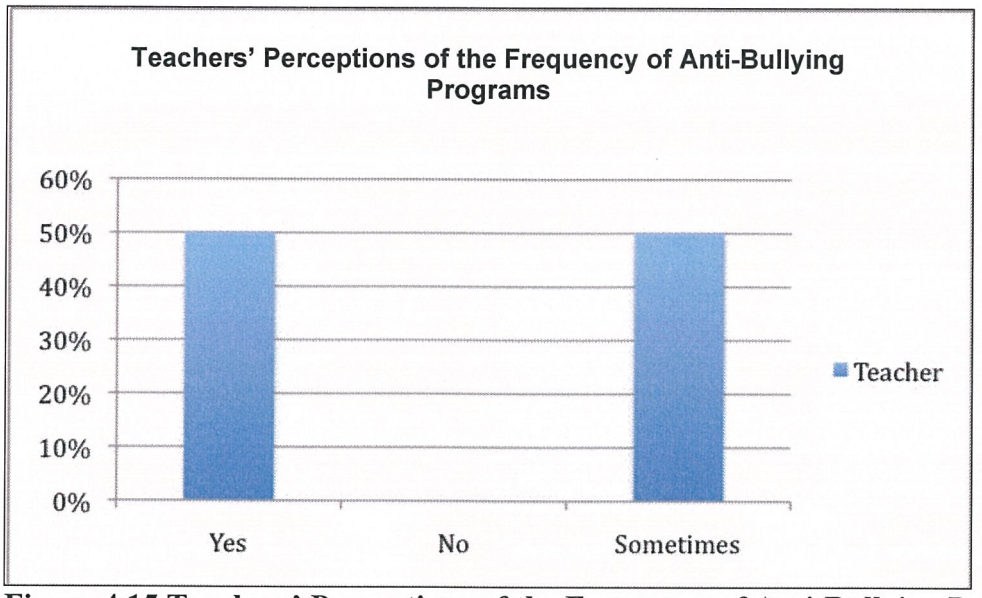


Figure 4.15 Teachers' Perceptions of the Frequency of Anti-Bullying Programs

Question 10

Teachers were asked whether they believed the most common form of bullying was physical (hitting/kicking), verbal (verbal abuse or harassment) or indirect (exclusion or humiliation). Respondents were able to tick one or all of the boxes provided.

Results indicated that the teachers perceived the most common form of bullying, was physical bullying (75%), followed by verbal bullying (50%) and indirect bullying (50%). This showed a discrepancy between student and teacher responses where students reported verbal bullying was the most regular type of bullying. Verbal bullying is reported in the literature as being the most common type of bullying among primary school students. The identification of teachers' awareness level of the type of bullying occurring indicates that they see or intervene more during physical instances and provide harsher punishments for students involved in this type. This notion was stated in the focus group by teachers:

"Oh yeah, Physical is more severe. You will come down harder."

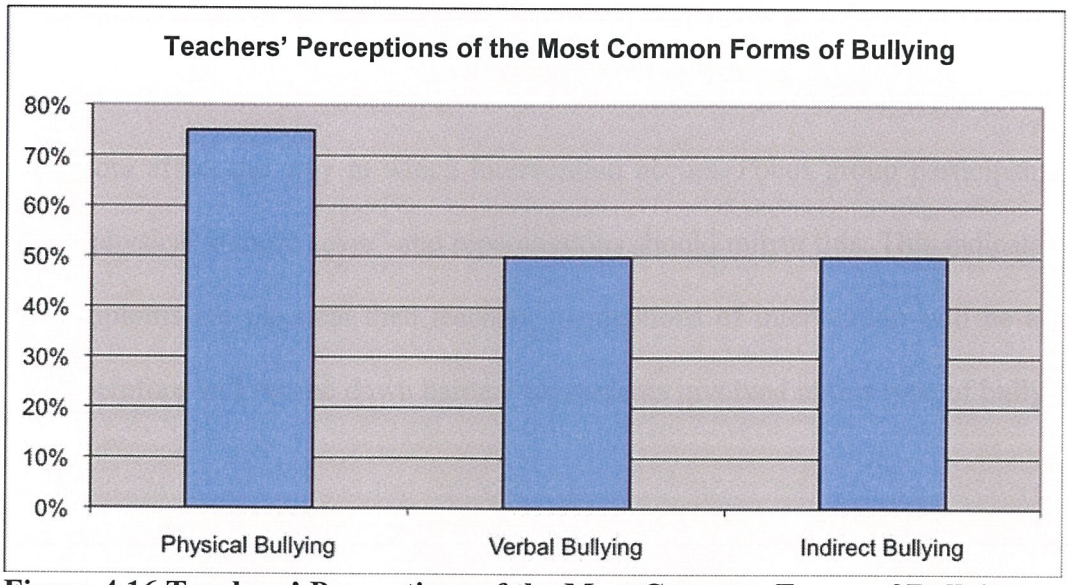


Figure 4.16 Teachers' Perceptions of the Most Common Forms of Bullying

In summary, the types of situations in which bullying is perceived to will depend on teachers' perceptions of the contextual factors, various types of beliefs that they hold, their knowledge about what constitutes bullying, and their past experiences of bullying behaviour. The knowledge, skills and experience held by individuals will mould their understanding of bullying, while a teacher's ability to intervene, during the witnessing of bullying or following a report of an event, directly influence their intervention. Perception of bullying, it was felt, would predominantly be influenced by the environment in which the incident occurs, the outcomes or consequences of the bullying actions (i.e. Physical or verbal outcomes/consequence) or if the incident is witnessed first hand by a staff member. Responses on perception are as follows:

The environment in which bullying occurs appeared to have no differentiated effect on the way teachers would intervene in a bullying circumstance. No matter the environment the incident was still considered to be bullying and therefore would not affect the way in which the situation was dealt with.

The consequence of an action or the symptoms that occur as a result of the bullying incident would in fact primarily influence a teachers' perception of bullying and therefore affect the way in which intervention occurs. Focus group participants felt that "physical is more sever" and repercussions should mirror this. This indicates that if symptoms are physical then teachers' perceptions of intervention will be altered and therefore will "come down harder" on students involved in this type of bullying.

As previously discussed a discrepancy was noted between the identified common type of bullying by both teachers and students. Forty six percent of students felt that verbal bullying was the most common type of bullying surrounding them at school with physical bullying coming in second. Upon the discussion of perception of bullying teachers felt more sever repercussions would be put in place for physical bullying due to the severity of an incident "Oh yeah, physical is more sever. You will come down harder." While 'severe' consequences are important if a student has been injured during an incident, it is also important to provide severe consequences, yet modified to suit, for verbal bullying in order for students to understand the severity of this problem as well.

The current chapter, results and discussions provided insight into the responses gained from student and teachers at one NSW primary school. While these results are unable to be generalised across other schools, the percentages found can provide insight into the number of students exposed to regular bullying and can be used as a guide for studies in other schools. Chapter five will further discuss the results and findings of the study while answering the 3 research questions that were outlined to be found in the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The questions guiding the present study were as follows: (a) What are the students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the school precinct in the NSW school investigated? (b) What perceptions of the level of bullying do the teachers of those students hold? (c) What are the similarities and differences between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying?

Children go to school wanting to feel as though they fit in to the schooling community. Research shows that most students are able to feel a sense of belonging as they enter the school environment, however, some students are not free from torment or bullying as they go about daily school activities. There has become an ever-increasing need for preventative measures and intervention techniques to be established that will assist with combating bullying (Dan Olweus Research Centre, 2001). Bullying being proactive rather than reactive indicates an awareness of exhibited behaviours where an outcome can be achieved at the expense of others (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). The present study has identified a high number of students who report being exposed to bullying on a regular basis. The results of the present study appeared to be considerably higher than those of previous studies including one completed within Australia by Rigby in 1997. It is not apparent as to why such high results were found during this study. Various reasons may have contributed to these results including; geographical location, demographics, the age group of participants involved in the study or a variance in the understandings of

behaviours that constitute bullying. If definitions of bullying vary across participants in studies, data becomes hard to compare and identify gaps or discrepancies.

Definitions of bullying provided by students were based mainly on specific actions occurring. No responses gained from any participant identified bullying as being a repeated engagement. Without this identification it can be assumed that participants' understanding of bullying as a one-off incident differs with the definitions previously mentioned in the literature review. The definitions provided by participants in the present study also differ greatly to the definition outlined by Olweus (1994). Olweus stated bullying occurred "When a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons" (Olweus, 1994). Thus it could be concluded that students' in the present study held an understanding of bullying and it associated behaviours at variance with the literature. Students did not provide in-depth thoughts into their understandings of bullying, but rather simply listed behaviour types when asked what bullying is. This, however, does not indicate that their reported levels of regular bullying occurrences are inaccurate as students were asked a variety of questions relating to bullying occurrence and its regularity to gain accurate results.

Even though participants did not outline repeated actions as a definition to bullying this is not to say they are not exposed to peer victimisation, and some on a more frequent basis than others. None the less, their definitions provide helpful insights into the capabilities that students in Years 3 and 4 have in explaining bullying or even their level of understanding of bullying. It is interesting to consider the notion that, with a limited explanation of bullying provided, participants may not wholly

comprehend the idea of bullying. This, therefore, may affect students understanding of their involvement in peer victimisation situations and may not identify specific behaviours as socially unacceptable or as bullying.

As outlined students have common responses as to what comprises bullying. It can only be assumed and not concluded that participants understanding of bullying does not involve the idea of repetition. With a high number of students stating that they see various behaviours regularly around their school precinct and a high number of reported cases of regular bullying provides indication of the idea of repetition of bullying behaviours.

Students most often gave one or two word definitions of bullying and which were quantified using simple frequencies during the data analysis phase. The most common definition outlined by girls was the idea of 'being mean', which could indicate a number of behaviours encompassing bullying.

The results gained from bullying regularity indicated that a higher number of students were bullied on a weekly basis at the school in which the study was conducted as opposed to the results of past studies undertaken both overseas and within Australia. This result may in fact indicate a rise in the number of bullying cases occurring and being reported in New South Wales primary schools during 2008.

The types of bullying identified throughout the study by both teachers and students as occurring regularly are similar to that of other studies. Verbal bullying was reported as being most common with behaviours such as name-calling and teasing being

identified most frequently. This commonality of results shows a similarity of experiences shared by students of similar age groups around the world. While the types of bullying were identified as being similar to that of other studies, so too was the precinct in which the bullying is occurring. Over the years the playground has seen much of reported bullying incidents, no difference is the present study that clearly identifies high levels of bullying in and around the playground.

Data from the two questionnaires were analysed and from the results it revealed a commonality existed between the types of bullying reported as occurring within the school precinct. Verbal bullying, specifically name calling and teasing, were found to be most prevalent. Previously stated, the literature outlines verbal bullying to be the most common form of bullying children are exposed to within Australia (Rigby, 1997). It was interesting to see that even though verbal bullying was reported by students as being the most common form of bullying occurring at this particular school, 75% of studied teachers felt that physical bullying occurred most regularly and these teachers then indicated that physical bullying would have more severe repercussions. This discrepancy that exists between teacher and students understandings could create confusion during bullying intervention. Exposure for a child to verbal bullying on a regular basis can lead to long term consequences just as sever as those exposed to verbal bullying, especially if intervention in the school precinct is not taking place effectively and students are left to deal with this issue on their own, constantly containing it within themselves.

Many similarities and differences existed between results gained from both teachers and students. Differences may have resulted due to varying understandings of

bullying definitions and behaviours that constitute bullying. No matter what ones' understanding of bullying is, if a child is feeling threatened, scared or hurt due to a power imbalance occurring regularly then intervention needs to take place to assist that child with the problems they are facing. So for teachers to say that students are not really sure what bullying is, develops a kind of approach to bullying based on personal beliefs and experiences. Ultimately this means that intervention will only take place when a teacher perceives that bullying is actually occurring. It is the understanding of bullying that makes the difference.

With an ever-changing phenomenon such as bullying, awareness and understandings need to change as time goes by as new and scary types of bullying have been seen to emerge, in which trends show this will continue to happen. Cyber bullying is a prime example of change in bullying types. Our technological advancements have allowed access to students for the purpose of peer victimisation outside of the schooling precinct, leaving children feeling as though they are not safe, even in their own homes (Rigby, 2008 p. 26,35).

A similarity found from the data in the present study revealed that the rate of teachers' intervention was high as reported by both teachers and students. Having teachers intervene in over 70% of reported bullying cases identified pleasing results as teachers desire to assist with students' regain feelings of wellbeing. Prevention of bullying is the key aim to anti-bullying programs within schools, however these programs are seen as only reducing the number of bullying cases occurring and increasing the awareness of the existence bullying. While preventative measure are still being established and **trialled** in schools across the world the techniques teachers

utilise during intervention are imperative and assist in providing safety for a child, even if this safety only exists for a short while until the next incident occurs.

Overall, the study revealed that teachers at the school which was the focus of the study are aware of bullying occurrences, however, from reports teachers substantially underestimated the level of students being bullied regularly. This identified a clear discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying within their Australian primary school.

This chapter discussed the significant results found in the study that supported the three research questions outlined at the beginning of the study. It allowed for discrepancies to be identified and results to be linked and compared to the literature. The following chapter, Chapter 6 will draw upon conclusions found in the present study. It will also outline recommendations for further study and close the present study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus far the study has identified and described teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in Years 3 and 4 at one New South Wales public school. It has identified students' perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in the same two classes as reported by students, and then it identified the discrepancies and similarities between student and teacher responses. The prevalence of bullying and understandings of both teachers and students were identified using self-report questionnaire as well a teacher focus group. The information gathered was then used by the researcher as a guide for comparison between the two groups of participants, being the teachers and their students. Chapter 6 will delineate the overall conclusions of the study while outlining a number of recommendation options for further research into the prominent area that is bullying.

Conclusions

Bullying is not a new problem. It is an issue in which children at a primary school level have been exposed to for years gone by. It was based on this assumption that teachers would therefore bring with them preconceived ideas about what constitutes bullying and the skills they have developed during the intervention of incident.

The research has indicated that there is a discrepancy in views between what students' and teachers' perceive peer victimisation levels are. Results were consistent with the high levels of bullying in the school precinct with other studies on this issue.

While teachers may be mindful that bullying is taking place in their school, they often underestimate at what level the bullying is occurring and the impact upon the students within there school. Ongoing bullying within the school precinct can have both short and long term implications for students. The consequences children are facing, with exposure to frequent peer victimisation appear at a high level at the studied school with a high number of students who report being bullying on a regular basis.

It is interesting to note throughout the study that not only were discrepancies evident among student and teacher responses but also among the responses teachers gave on their questionnaire compared to those discussed in the focus group. It is difficult to ascertain if the results from the questionnaire are more reliable than those gained during the focus group however, both sets of data results were deemed as accurate and analysed accordingly.

Previous studies completed across the world have identified that teachers only intervene in 4% of bullying cases. The studied school has revealed that teachers do intervene in most bullying cases with 50% of teachers stating that they regularly intervene and provide implications for bullying instances. Conclusively this shows that the school provides assistance to those exposed to peer victimisation, these results highly contradicted previous studies and shows the use of teachers' ability, knowledge and skills during intervention. Although teachers felt they intervened in most bullying incidents occurring within their school the level of students exposed to regular bullying is high compared to that of other studies indicating that the type of intervention occurring is inadequate and only dealing with each issue as it arises and

not the overall issue facing students. Summing up teacher responses to reports and questionnaire results it was identified that the view of the severity of a bullying problem is ultimately affected by prior personal experiences and the outcome of the bullying incident, meaning that the repercussions of bullying will vary as a result of a victims symptoms.

Children attending a public school have a right to feel as though they are part of a whole school community. Students are encouraged to develop their place within that community. It is from these beliefs that the Department of Education has mandated the implementation of anti-bullying policies. The approach in which a school implements these policies varies and differs according to the need identified at individual schools. The school participating in the present study utilises a whole-school approach to combat bullying and has found pleasing results in developing the understanding of their students through this interactive anti-bullying approach. Results concluded that this New South Wales school has identified a need to be proactive in addressing bullying, has taken this on board and has developed a scheme that appears at present to assist with bullying awareness among students.

This study completed within a New South Wales primary school has revealed yet more discrepancies existing between teachers' and their students and the prevalence of bullying occurring within their school. It is concluded that through the completion of this study a serious issue has further been identified and has opened the doors to addressing the harmful societal issue that is bullying.

Recommendations

Future research in this area could include more qualitative examination of students' perceptions and experiences of bullying. Although some of the data obtained displayed similar responses, a rich and valuable variety of responses were gained from the open-ended questions provided in the student questionnaire. Students were able to and encouraged to us their own words in order to gain varying responses without students being solely restricted to multiple-choice responses. The present study did employ a mixed methods approach upon data collection however a qualitative approach was not fully developed due to time restrictions so the implementation of a longitudinal study utilising a qualitative approach would be a beneficial way to develop subjective views and insights into bullying.

Studies completed in the area of bullying have revealed that peer victimisation occurrences decrease with age, while they do not discontinue altogether as students progress to high school. Results from previous studies have shown that bullying incidents are at their highest levels at the lower end of the schooling scale. This identifies a great need for studies to be conducted during the earlier years of schooling in order to identify its prevalence and development levels. While the present study was conducted in a year level lower than that of any other found studies further studies could be developed to suit a younger age group to find out where bullying really emerges. Identifying this may allow for programs to be develops that target direct age groups where bullying behaviours are first occurring.

Previously stated throughout the literature review researchers have yet to develop a concise definition of bullying. Olweus' (1993) definition of bullying is widely

accepted as a common definition however the use of other definitions is also available. The development of a concise definition would overall enhance the reliability of results, as each researcher would then be comparing data collected with one definition encompassing all aspects of bullying. While some researchers have concluded definitions stating that bullying involves repeated action and a repetitive occurrence, much past research, involving student identification of bullying incidents, allow respondents to state one off occurrences, which therefore skew results and provide inconsistent data relating to the definition.

Prevention and intervention techniques are always an area of prominent research where continual studies can be completed to find relevant ways in which bullying can be dealt with. As seen in this study's theoretical framework, each teacher is provided, as an employed professional, the ability to intervene. This study identified ways in which intervention is affected through perception, knowledge and skills as well as the personal experience one brings with them to bullying incidents. Conducting further research into the intervention and prevention skills a teacher applies during bullying incidents will help to identify gaps in skills based in-services provided to teachers to assist in combating bullying. Schools should make intervention a priority into combating bullying and more research in this area can only assist with a schools skills and knowledge in doing do.

The acts in which bullying is associated are continually changing as society does. The most recent phenomenon on the bullying scale is that of cyber-bullying. Studies comparing students reports into cyber-bullying prevalence compared to those reports

gained from teachers would identifies a teacher's current awareness into the ever-changing phenomenon of bullying.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Letter to Principal

29 October 2007

XXX Public School
Address

Attention: The Principal

Dear Principal

My name is Christina Smith and I am currently undertaking an Honours Program at Avondale College which is located on the Central Coast. I am studying for a degree in Primary Education and I am due to graduate at the end of 2008.

For the Honours program I am required to complete a research project in an area of interest to me. My interest is in studying the prevalence of bullying within primary schools from a students perspective, and comparing it to the perception teachers have in the occurrence of bullying.

With your approval, I am interested in conducting this study at your Primary School. It would be based on conducting a questionnaire involving a number of students in Years 3 and 4, within your school using a stratified sampling approach.

Three to four staff members will also be involved in a focus group that will ultimately help gain relevant information for comparison with statistical data. All questionnaires will be provided and if possible will need to be completed during class time. The questionnaire will take no more than half an hour to complete. I hope this does not inconvenience classrooms too much. This study will hopefully take place early in Term 1 2008. I am still working on final details for my questionnaire. I am also still waiting on my ethical clearance but see no problems with this occurring.

It would be great if you could please contact me regarding this letter even if you are unable to help. An envelope is provided in order for you to send a reply.

Yours sincerely,

Christina Smith

Appendix 2. Permission Letters to Parents and Student Participants

Letter of Consent for Parents and Student Participants in:



Avondale College

Awareness of Bullying Prevalence: Do the reported level of bullying by students in primary schools match the level of awareness staff indicate?

I _____, hereby give consent for my child/ren _____ to participate in the abovementioned research study, being conducted by Christina Smith from Avondale College, as part of her Honours Program.

I understand that students will be directly involved in completing an anonymous questionnaire for the researcher.

I understand that the results of this questionnaire will be used as data during the study.

I understand that my child/ren's details will remain confidential and be known only to the researcher as male or female, and that they will not be identified by name in any presentation or publication resulting from this study.

I know that I can withdraw my child/ren from the study at any time I choose.

The data from this study will be used to formulate statistical data regarding bullying awareness among student and teachers in primary schools.

If any significant issues arise from the data collected, following discussion with the researcher's supervisor, this information will be appropriately reported to the school principal.

I have discussed this project with my child and they are comfortable being involved in this study.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed if they have any complaint concerning that manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 pr fax (02) 4980 2117.

Singed (parent):_____ Date: _____

Signed (researcher): _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3. Letter of Consent for Teacher Participants in:



Avondale College

Awareness of Bullying Prevalence: Do the reported level of bullying by students in primary schools match the level of awareness staff indicate?

I _____, hereby give consent to participate in the abovementioned research study, being conducted by Christina Smith from Avondale College, as part of her Honours Program.

I understand that I will be directly involved in an interview session conducted by the researcher and may also be video or voice recorded on this occasion. A questionnaire will also be completed before the interview session.

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher regarding bullying information.

I understand that my details will remain confidential and be known only to the researcher, and that I will not be identified by name in any presentation or publication resulting from this study.

I know I can withdraw from the study at anytime I choose.

The data from this study will be used to formulate statistical data regarding bullying awareness among student and teachers in primary schools.

If any significant issues arise from the data collected, following discussion with the researcher's supervisor, this information will be appropriately reported to the school principal.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed if they have any complaint concerning that manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 pr fax (02) 4980 2117.

Signed (participant): _____ Date: _____

Signed (researcher): _____ Date: _____

Date _____ Please tick

Boy ☐ Girl ☐

Bullying Questionnaire

1) True or False

a) Bullying is just teasing T / F
b) Some people deserve to be bullied T / F
c) Only boys are bullied T / F
d) People who complain about bullies are babies T / F
e) All bullies have low self-esteem. That's why they pick on other people T / F

2) What do you think bullying another person or group means?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3) What kind of behaviour do you see at your school? Tick any of the examples you have seen around your school and then add some of your own examples. The first one has been done for you

a) Spitting on someone ☐
b) Calling someone a mean name ☐
c) Asking or demanding money ☐
d) Ignoring a new student ☐
e) Hitting or kicking ☐
f) _____ ☐
g) _____ ☐
h) _____ ☐

4) At school have you ever been bullied? (circle answer)
Yes /No

5) How often does a teacher help when someone is being bullied?
(circle answer)

Always / Sometimes / Never

6) Do you always tell a teacher when you or someone else is being bullied? (circle answer)

Yes / Sometimes / No

7) How often do you see this kind of behaviour around your school? Tick the number that best suits. Add some of your own examples.

1 = every day **2 = quite often**

3 = once in a while **4 = hardly ever** **5 = never**

	1	2	3	4	5
a) Spitting on someone					
b) Calling someone a mean name					
c) Asking or demanding money					
d) Ignoring a new student					
e) Hitting or kicking					
f) Spreading stories about someone					
g) _____					
h) _____					
i) _____					

8) Put a tick in the box that best suits you.

Other students have:

a) Tried to hurt me or others
b) Said they would beat me up
c) Tried to break something of mine
d) Tried to make me do something for them
e) Called me names
f) Tried to tease me
g) Tried to insult me
h) Picked on me
i) Spread stories about me
j) Made others want to stop being my friend
k) Tried to get me into trouble

Once a day	Once a week	Once a term	Never

9) The bullies at my school are: (tick correct box)

a) Popular with other students ☐
b) Are feared by other students ☐
c) Are disliked by other students ☐

10) If you were being bullied, how would coming to school each day make you feel?

_____

_____

11) If you or someone you know is bullied where does this bullying most often happen? For example in the playground by the toilet block.

_____

_____

12) Do you have activities in class that teach you about bullying and the right way to treat your classmates?

(Circle correct answer)

Yes / Sometimes / No

Appendix 5. Teachers' Questionnaire

Date _____

Please tick

Male ☐ Female ☐

Bullying Questionnaire

1) What do you consider to be bullying behaviour?

_____

_____

_____

2) Circle the appropriate answer.

a) I consider bullying to be a current problem in this school.

Yes/No

b) I will intervene as often as possible in bullying situations

Yes/No

c) I feel I have enough knowledge to adequately deal with bullying situations that occur around the school. Yes/No

d) I feel responsible in helping to prevent bullying

Yes/No

3) Tick the correct answer.

To the best of my knowledge children are being bullied:

Once or twice a week ☐

Once or twice a term ☐

Once a year ☐

Never ☐

4) How many children do you think are bullied on a regular basis, meaning at least one a week? (tick correct answer)

1 in 6 ☐

1 in 10 ☐

1 in 15 ☐

1 in 20 ☐

1 in 50 ☐

5) How often does a teacher help when someone is being bullied? (circle answer)

Always / Sometimes / Never

6) What are some signs that indicate a child is being bullied?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7) Where in the school grounds is bullying most likely to occur?

_____

_____

8) Do you think that children will tell you or another teacher if they are being bullied? Why or Why not?

_____

_____

_____

9) Do you have activities in class that teach children about bullying and the right way to treat their peers?

(Circle correct answer)

Yes / Sometimes / No

10) The most common form of bullying is: (tick correct answer)

Physical (eg. Hitting, kicking)

☐

Verbal (eg. Verbal abuse, harassment) ☐

Indirect bullying (eg. exclusion, humiliation)

☐

Interview Questions

a. **How many years have you been teaching?**

b. **How do you see bullying and what do you think of it occurring?**

c. **What experiences have you had with bullying, either as a child or during your teaching profession?**

d. **In your view, is bullying a problem in your classroom?**

e. **What is your estimate of the total number of students in grades 3 and 4 that you think are being bullied?**

f. **How many students in your class do you think are bullied at least once a week?**

g. **How regularly do you think bullying is occurring? Why do you say this?**

h. **In what ways are the students in your class bullied? Explain in detail the types of bullying and actions that occur.**

i. **How often do you think other students attempt to stop the bullying that is occurring? Why do you think this?**

j. **If a child reports bullying (an incident you did not witness) what do you do?**

k. **Would you say that you are more likely to intervene in a bullying situation if you witness it first hand? Why or why not?**

l. **Do you think your perception of bullying is affected by any of the following factors? Why or why not? (the environment; the consequences of the actions, whether or not it is witnessed first hand).**

m. **On average how often do you intervene to deal with students who are being bullied?**

n. **Do you feel you have enough knowledge to adequately deal with bullying among students in your school? Why or Why not?**

o. **Do you feel it is your responsibility to prevent bullying? Why or why not?**

p. **What signs would indicate to you that a child was being bullied?**

q. **Are the previous signs of bullying something you see often in your class?**

r. **Where in the school precinct is bullying most likely to occur? Why?**

s. **In your view, does your school have effective measures to prevent bullying or even stop it?**

t. **Does your school have a bullying program that it teaches across all year levels? If so what program does your school use?**

u. **In your view, what is the strong point of this program?**

v. **Do you set aside time in your classroom to discuss bullying?**

w. **What other factors play a role in bullying and its intervention?**

x. **Commonly, do you think bullies at this school are ones that are well liked by other students or people other students are afraid of?**

Appendix 7. Permission from School Principal

Subject: Questionnaire
From: XXX
Date: Tue, 20 November, 2007 8:11 pm
To: Researcher
Priority: Normal
Options: View Full Header | View Printable Version | Download this as a file

Hi [redacted]
We would be willing to be part of your study on bullying. Please contact me on the number below to set up a time to discuss where to from here

[redacted]
Principal

AVONDALE COLLEGE LIBRARY