BULLYING VICTIMS:
THE EFFECTS LAST INTO COLLEGE

Authors

FRANK D. ADAMS, ED.D., is a Professor for the Department of Counseling and Special Education in the School of Education and Counseling at Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska.

GLORIA J. LAWRENCE, PH.D., is a Professor for the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Criminal Justice in the School of Natural & Social Sciences at Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska.

Abstract

This study examined whether those bullied in schools continued to show the effects of being bullied after they enrolled in an institution of higher education. There were 269 undergraduate students participating in the study. Previous studies (2006; 2008) conducted by the authors suggested the effects of bullying upon both the victim and bully are long lasting; victims of bullying at the college level indicated histories of being bullied throughout their school years. The results of this study suggest bullying in junior high and/or high school continues into college; the negative effects associated with being victimized or acting as the bully continue into the college years.

The act of bullying, or being bullied, has been viewed as a "rite of passage" (Brown, 2006, para.1); until a violent act occurs to focus attention on bullying, it has generally received little attention from educators. Research suggests that, as a result of their experience of being bullied, some victims became bullies themselves. Others performed poorly in their academic work and eventually dropped out of school, and still others chose a more dramatic response to having been bullied, such as committing suicide (Lawrence & Adams, 2006; Olweus, 1978; & Smith, 2011). Various types

and degrees of bullying have been described by Monks and Smith (2010). Monks and Smith reviewed various definitions and rationale for bullying behaviors. They also examined bullying at various age levels and concluded it exists at all age levels in varying degrees.

Cyberbullying (Rubin, 2008; Strom & Strom, 2005) and workplace bullying (Fritzgerald, 2010) are now being more closely examined owing to the widespread and potentially negative effects on the victims. Bullying in the workplace has been examined from the perspective of an "ongoing behavior" developed from an educational setting (Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003). Newman, Holden, and Delville indicated that a history of victimization was associated with increased levels of stress and avoidant coping strategies during the college years. As Oliver and Candappa (2003) suggested, bullies are everywhere; so, too, are the victims.

Problem Statement

Do students who have experienced episodes of being bullied in school continue to exhibit characteristics or effects of being bullied after having been enrolled in an institution of higher education?

Review of Current Literature

Investigations of the effects of bullying received wide recognition in the 1970s with the work of Olweus (1978) whose studies were triggered by the suicides of several young victims of bullying. Olweus pointed out that the power differences between bully and victim are a crucial component of the interactions. Parker & Asher (1987) discussed the negative consequences for children bullied in elementary school including middle school adjustment difficulties and the greater likelihood of quitting school. Adams, Lawrence, and Schenck (2008) and Lawrence and Adams (2006) suggested that greater notice has been taken of the presence of bullying between the elementary school and the secondary school years. They stressed the "continuous effect" of bullying experienced during the lower grades on the middle school grades and continuing into the secondary school years.

Pellegrini, Bartini and Brooks (1999) examined the occurrence of bullying, victimization, and aggressive victimization during early adolescence (5th grade); they reported that bullies were more emotional and physical than their elementary school peers. Bullies sought peer friendships with other aggressive individuals; the friendships existed primarily as a "cover." Nansel et al. (2001) reported that bullying occurred with greater frequency among middle school-aged youth than among high school-aged youth; mo-

5

bility of the secondary student was one factor for the reduced number of bullies at that level.

Espelage and Swearer (2003) indicated that bullying at all levels - early elementary, middle, or secondary school - included an ongoing and escalating physical and/or verbal aggression by one or more individuals who seek to attain dominance, status, or property at the various levels. They cited a wide range of bully-victim behaviors or roles: a bully, a victim, a bully-victim, and/or a bystander. The researchers noted the growing presence of female bullies affecting both genders with their aggressive behavior. Tritt and Duncan (1997) indicated that bullied adults, young adults and their victims reported significantly more loneliness than those not involved in bullying situations. They also reported that there were similar levels of lower self-esteem in young adults who were childhood bullies or victims than those not involved in bullying experiences.

The present study was conducted to determine whether those bullied in schools continued to show the effects of being bullied after they entered college. Adams, Lawrence, and Schenck (2008) suggested that the effects of bullying on the victims were long-lasting; the current study investigated whether victims of bullying at the college level have histories of being bullied throughout the school years.

The process of bullying is complex, involving many factors. There is no single causal factor for a bully to select one or many victims, but the individuals who are already struggling socially to "fit in" and who appear awkward in various social settings are much more vulnerable to the bully. There is also no single factor for an individual to become a victim.

Method

Participants

A total of 269 undergraduate students (56 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 67 juniors, and 81 seniors) at a midwestern state college (total enrollment 3,500) volunteered to participate. Participants were 176 females and 93 males, closely approximating the 2:1 female-to-male distribution of the college student body. Participants' ages were 19-23 years (n = 240), 24-29 years (n = 20), and 30+ years (n = 9).

Development of the Instrument

The questions used for this study were developed from a review of current and relevant journal articles, and reports, as well as information gained from individual discussions held with a variety of ages of individuals (ranging from 12 to 47) who identified themselves as having been bullied either

during middle school, secondary school, or college years. None of the individuals involved in these discussions were included in the study. The survey was not normed for use in this study.

Procedure

Participants for the study were recruited from randomly selected classes at a rural college; informed consents and questionnaires were distributed by a student assistant to reduce bias and/or implied pressure to participate in the study. A debriefing statement was read after all questionnaires were completed and returned to the assistant. Any questions relating to the survey instrument were addressed by the student assistants administering the survey.

Participants first signed an informed consent stating a description of the study concerning bullying behaviors at the college level. The informed consent was followed by a self-report questionnaire (See Appendix A.); the questionnaire provided demographics (age, gender, and year in school, etc.), twenty statements on which participants responded using the 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree), as well as a section for any additional comments that could be made anonymously.

Findings

Scores 5 to 1 were assigned to the responses (5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree). The only relationships that failed to reach significance were the relationships between feeling "safe" (Statement 1), feeling "alone and isolated" (Statement 4), "threatened with physical harm" (Statement 7), and "individuals laugh at me" (Statement 17) (see Appendix A).

A total of 100 (37.2%) participants reported they had been bullied in high school or junior high school by answering 'strongly agree' or 'agree' to that statement. They were assigned to the Bullied group. The Non-Bullied group consisted of 160 (59.5%) participants who answered 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree.' Data from nine participants (3.3%) were eliminated from analyses, because they failed to respond to the statement or they answered 'no opinion.'

A one-way ANOVA was conducted on participants' total scores; an eta squared index for relative treatment magnitude was also performed. Those bullied in high school and/or junior high school scored significantly higher than those not bullied in high school or junior high school, F (1,258) = 90.51, $p<.001$ ($n^2=.35$). Cohen (1977) suggested a "large" effect is a value of .15, a "medium" effect is a value of .06, and a "small" effect is a value of .01.

For each question, the percentage of participants who responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' was examined. Except for "I feel safe only in my

dorm room," groups differed significantly on all questions, $ts > 4.3$, $ps < .001$, $r_{pb} > 2.63$.

Discussion

These data do not support previous data suggesting that bullying decreases as grade level increases to approximately 5% in the 9th grade (Olweus, 1999). In the present study, 37% of participants had been bullied in high school and /or junior high school. The data also suggest that bullying occurs in schools in rural areas; participants of this study were members of a college population in which 65% came from high schools whose senior classes had less than 100 students.

The data suggest that students who are bullied in high school and/or junior high school continue to be victimized (called names, excluded from class activities, physically abused, etc.) in college. Whether a consequence of being bullied in high school, in junior high school, or in college, the victims feel alone and isolated. They find it hard to make friends, and they feel that no one will listen to them while in college. Victims also reported that they do not know how to fight back when individuals say hurtful things to them (Statement 9); they report this to a much greater degree than those not bullied.

The only relationships that failed to reach significance were between feeling safe in their dorm room and feeling alone and isolated, threatened with physical harm, and being laughed at. No significant difference was found between groups on feeling safe only in their dorm room; both groups scored relatively high.

Data from previous studies (Lawrence & Adams, 2006; Adams, Lawrence, & Schenck, 2008) conducted by the researchers indicated that bullying continued from early elementary grades through secondary school years. The data from the current study indicate that the effects of bullying continue from the secondary school environments into institutions of higher education. The negative effects of bullying are associated with the characteristics of being victimized. The data for this study reflect much of previous research conducted on bullying behavior and characteristics of both bully and victim. The current study builds upon information presented in the various research reports (Lawrence & Adams, 2006; Adams, Lawrence, & Schenck, 2008); there was no attempt to continue or replicate previous research.

The research of Nansel et al. (2001), and Espelage and Swearer (2003) provided a background for the current researchers to identify and describe seven terms reflecting the data from this study. Guided by the work of Nan-

sel et al., and Espelage and Swearer, we use the following terms to describe the characteristics and lasting effects of bullying.

1. <u>safety</u> - being unsure of a secure location within which one may be able to relax, or feel comfortable; the individual's security has been compromised. Victims only feels safe in their dorm rooms, or a confined space which has a restricted access. They are afraid someone will say something hurtful, afraid to tell anyone about electronic messages, afraid to go to certain classes, and find few places they feel safe.

2. <u>exclusion</u> - being "left out" of conversations, groupings, or lack a sense of belonging to a group. Victims feel they are often excluded from class or group activities.

3. <u>isolation</u> - feeling a lack of inclusion, or being a member. Victims feel alone and isolated much of the day and feel that no one will listen to them.

4. <u>abuse</u> - receiving negative comments or treated in a disrespectful manner after having expressed behavior and/or conversation deemed inappropriate by an individual or a group. Victims report having been abused for expressing their opinions, having received insulting/degrading text messages, and being laughed at when responding to questions in class.

5. <u>alienation</u> - feeling or sensing an inability to connect, or communicate in a positive manner with other individuals or groups. Victims report it is hard for them to make friends.

6. <u>lonely</u> - feeling that there is no one willing to communicate with one, feeling a sense of having no friend or acquaintance for conversations. Victims feel alone and isolated, feel that no one will believe them, and only wish to sleep.

7. <u>A Rite of Passage</u> - feeling that the action is one which symbolized a growth, or achievement owing to having endured an act of harassment. For victims, being bullied is not a "right" of passage.

Conclusions

The current study supports conclusions reported by Barker et al. (2008): Youths victimized by their peers were at an increased risk, in turn, of victimizing others as they move from one environment to another. The Center for Disease Control (2011) reported bullying continues to occur at all levels within the educational environment. This study provides supporting data indicating bullying initiated in middle/senior high school years continues

in other educational settings. The State of Massachusetts reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2011) that bullying continues today at various levels within the school years. This study supports that bullying continues beyond the school years - into either institutions of higher education or into the workplace.

Exclusion, abuse, alienation, and loneliness reported in this study are poignantly reflected in current legal action taken against a school district that refused to take a positive stand against harassment and bullying (Smith, 2011). The district elected to use a policy of "neutrality." Smith indicated the message present in an environment of this type is clear - who you are is "not OK;" bullying is permissible throughout the educational environment until "you change".

With more focus being directed to and from a variety of venues, such as the media (Miller, 2010), academic settings (Rigby, 2010), and the workplace (Oade, 2009), more information and resources are available on bullying; however, there is a need for more information examining the long-term effects of the bullying behavior on both the victim and the bully.

References

Adams, F. D., Lawrence, G. J., & Schenck, S. (2008, Spring). A survey on bullying: Some reflections on the findings. *NASCD News & Notes, 8*, 1-7.

Barker, E. D., Arseneault, L., Brendgen, M., Fontaine, N., & Maughan, B. (2008, September). Joint development of bullying and victimization in adolescence: Relations to delinquency and self-harm. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 47*(9), 1030-1038.

Brown, N. L. (2006, December 23). Harassment and bullying: Not a rite of passage. Retrieved from http://www.healthline.com/ blogs/teen_health/2006/12/harassment-and-bullying-not-rite-of.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. (2011). Bullying among middle school and high school students - Massachusetts, 2009. *The Journal of the American Medical Association, 22*(305), 2283-2286.

Cohen, J.M. (1977). Sources of peer group homogeneity. *Sociology of Education, 50*, 227-241.

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? *School Psychology Review, 32*(3), 365-383.

Fritzgerald, B. (2010, August 13). Did UVA administration respond to claims of "workplace bullying"? *C-VILLE Charlottesville News & Arts*. Retrieved from http://www.c-ville.com/index

Lawrence, G. J., & Adams, F. D. (2006, Fall). For every bully there is a victim. *American Secondary Education, 35*(1), 66-71.

Miller, T. W. (Ed.). (2010). *Handbook of stressful conditions across the lifespan.* New York, NY: Springer Publisher.

Monks, C. P., & Smith, P. K. (2010, December). Definitions of bullying: Age differences in understanding of the term and the role of experience. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 24*(4), 801-821.

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001, April 25). Bullying behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *The Journal of the American Medical Association, 285*(16), 2094-2100.

Newman, M. L., Holden, G. W., & Delville, Y. (2011, March). Coping with the stress of being bullied: Consequences of coping strategies among college students. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 2*(2), 205-211.

Oade, A. (2009). *Managing workplace bullying: How to identify, respond to and manage bullying behavior in the workplace.* New York, NY: Palgrave & MacMillan Publishers.

Oliver, C., & Candappa, M. (2003). Tackling bullying: Listening to the views of children and young people. *Special Report.* London, UK: Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, Department for Education and Skills.

Olweus, D. O. (1978). *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys.* Washington, DC: Hemisphere Press (Wiley).

Olweus, D. O. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Olweus, D. O. (1999). The nature of school bullying (pp. 28-48). In P. K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Cantalano, & P.Slee (Eds). (1999). *The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective.* Florence, KY: Taylor & Frances/Routledge. xiii, 384 pp.

Parker, J. G., & Asher, S. R. (1987). Peer relations and later personal adjustment: Are low-accepted children at risk? *Psychological Bulletin, 103*, 357-389.

Pellegrini, A. S., Bartini, M., & Brooks, F. (1999). School bullies, victims, and aggressive victims. Factors relating to group affiliation and victimization in early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology,91*(2), 216-224.

Rigby, K. (2010). *Bullying interventions in schools: Six basic approaches.* Victoria, AU: Australian Council for Educational Research Press.

Rubin, R. (2008). 'Electronic aggression:' Another form of bullying. *USA Today.Com, para. 1.*

Smith, K. (2011, July 22). Anoka-Hennepin sued over bullying. *Minneapolis Star Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.startribune.com/local/north/125958688.html

Smith, P. K, Singer, M., Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. L. (2003, May). Victimization in the school and the workplace: Are there any links? *The British Journal of Psychology, 94*(2), 175-188.

Strom, P. S., & Strom, R. D. (2005). Cyberbullying by adolescents: A preliminary assessment. *The Educational Forum, 70*, 21-36.

Tritt, C., & Duncan, R. D. (1997, September). The relationship between childhood bullying and young adult self-esteem and loneliness. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development, 36*(1), 35-44. ERIC Document EJ568410

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

1. I feel safe only in my dorm room.

2. Students in my class call me names, say something hurtful to me, or say something loud enough for me to hear.

3. I am often excluded from class activities.

4. For much of the day I feel alone and isolated.

5. I have been physically abused by someone in my classes, more than once, for expressing my opinion.

6. As I walk to and from class, I am afraid someone will say something hurtful to me.

7. I have been threatened with physical harm this week.

8. I have received more than one email which had insulting comments about me.

9. I don't know how to fight back when individuals say hurtful things to me, or about me.

10. I have received more than one text message that was insulting and degrading to me.

11. I am afraid to tell anyone about being hurt or harmed from emails, text messages, or instant messages.

12. No one believes me about being hurt, insulted, or harmed from emails or instant messages.

13. I am afraid to go to certain classes because of individuals present in those classes.

14. I experienced acts of bullying during my years in high school and/or junior high school.

15. During the day, or in my classes, I only wish to sleep.

16. I find that I have great difficulty concentrating in class because of certain individuals in that class.

17. When I respond to an instructor's question, there is always laughter from individuals in the class.

18. It is hard for me to make friends.

19. No one will listen to me; I feel so alone and isolated.

20. There are few places in the school where I feel safe.

The questions were developed by the researchers from a review of relevant journal articles and reports as well as information gained from discussions held with individuals who identified themselves as having been bullied and not participating in the current study during middle school, secondary school, or college years.

The survey was not normed for this study.