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Do Bullying Interventions Work? The Educators' Perspective

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Since bullying is prevalent in all national, cultural, religious, and ethnic groups, bullies cannot be defined by appearance or group membership (United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017, p. 12). There has been an attempt to define bullying over the past few years resulting in the identification of two reoccurring components: an imbalance of power, and repeated acts of aggression. Although bullying is considered a type of aggression, not all aggression involves acts of bullying (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010). Several elements need to be considered when defining bullying. "Bullying is the repeated physical, verbal, and psychological attacks and intimidation directed against a victim who cannot defend him/herself because of an imbalance of power due to his lack of strength, being outnumbered, or less psychological resilience" (Sampson, 2009, n.p.).

There has been more attention regarding the bullying phenomenon and as a result, researchers have used a variety of terms in their attempt to define it which has led to some inconsistency and confusion. It is accepted among researchers that three types of bullying exist: physical, verbal, and relational (Olweus, 2001). Bullying can manifest itself in other forms of anti-social behavior such as, but not limited to, assault, rumor spreading, intentional isolation, extortion, theft, destruction of property, threats, teasing, and name-calling. Batsche (as cited in Elias & Zins, 2003) reported verbal and physical victimization are the most prevalent type of bullying for school-aged children, with males engaging in more bullying behaviors than females. Although bullying can occur anywhere, many instances of bullying occur during unsupervised times such as class change, lunch, in locker rooms, arrival and dismissal from school, and in cyberspace using e-mail, texting, and other forms of electronic communication including social media (Veenstra, Siegwart, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014).

Bullies

Two characteristics of the typical bully include physical strength, most particularly in males, and aggressive reaction pattern. Aggressive reaction pattern has been prevalent in children who have been reared by parents who: (a) have an indifference to affection and involvement, (b) exhibit permissive attitudes toward aggressive behaviors, (c) use authoritarian techniques such as corporal punishments, and (d) have children with an active aggressive temperament (Olweus, 1994). Males engage in acts of bullying at a higher rate than females; however, males perpetrate acts of direct bullying, whereas females are more apt to engage in indirect bullying (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008).

Victims of Bullying

The American Medical Association (AMA) encouraged physicians to identify physical and mental damages, along with instances of death, associated with the results of bullying and to advocate for partnerships with parents, schools, and public health entities to create programs designed to prevent bullying (Srabstein, Berman, & Pyntikova, 2008). Children who experience frequent and relentless bullying suffer consequences beyond embarrassment and many of the psychological and physiological effects are long lasting. Victimized children are three to four times more likely to develop low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety that cause health ailments including headaches, gastric stress, insomnia, and other stressors that can manifest into high rates of absenteeism and poorer grades than children who are not bullied (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Research suggests that bullied children experience chronic emotional problems including feelings of low self-worth and mal adjustment, which can further intensify peer rejection episodes causing the bullied children to blame themselves for what they perceive

as social dysfunction (Committee for Children, 2001, 2005; Graham & Juvonen, 1998, p. 21). Frequent victims tend to show visible signs of passivity, anxiety, and insecurity, which may reveal to others that they are easy targets for bullying and harassment. Olweus (1994) made commentary on such a dilemma:

> It does not require much imagination to understand what it is to go through the school years in a state of permanent anxiety and insecurity, and with poor self-esteem. It is not surprising that the victims' devaluation of themselves sometimes becomes so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution. (pp. 1182-1183)

In extreme cases, high incidences of suicide are prevalent.

Cyber Bullying

In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on cyber bullying. Many of today's children are frequent users of technology and can be online with little or no adult supervision (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007). This lack of supervision can lead to negative behaviors such as exposure to drugs, violence, pornography, interaction with criminals, and bullying. Mishna et al. (2012) reported that 93% of U.S. youth between the ages of 12 to 17 log on to online sites regularly and 63% go online daily. Furthermore, by 2010 75% of teenagers owned a cellular telephone, with 88% having the capability to text (Mishna et al.).

The contrasting differences between traditional bullying and cyber bullying is that the former is typically face-to-face, and the latter has the potential to occur with anonymity or with a large group of bystanders. Although harmful cyber posts can be created anonymously, the cyber bully can also masquerade as someone else and cyber posts can easily be left in cyber space for all to see for a long duration of time; or, in contrast, can be taken down quickly to reduce the

chances of being caught. Additionally, traditional bullying has a smaller audience whereas instances of cyber bullying have larger audiences.

In a study by Sticca and Peeren (2012), seventh- and eighth-grade students were provided with bullying scenarios and were asked to rank them by severity. The results of the study showed that scenarios that occurred more publicly were worse than those that were private, and instances of anonymous bullying were perceived to be worse as well. Results of research by Schade, Larwin, and Larwin (2017) suggested that cyberbullies who post in public social media domains might be motivated by having their acts of bullying for all to see, including other victims and bullies alike. Scholars have a difficult time defining cyber bullying because technology, and the use of it, is constantly expanding; however, they do agree that traditional bullying and cyber bullying differ (Heller, 2015). Traditional bullying is often direct or face-to-face, whereas cyber bullying is not; instead, it is perpetrated easily because it can occur at any time and any location. In this case, cyber bullies do not necessarily need to be more powerful in the context of the accepted definition of bullying and they do not witness the distress of the victim and are less likely to get caught (Heller, 2015).

In a study by Agatston et al. (2007), students were less likely to report instances of cyber bullying to adults at school because they believed the adults were more likely to react to the rules prohibiting the use of cellular phones and not the bullying itself. Although at a low rate, students were more likely to report cyber bullying to a parent but feared the loss of technology use.

Current legislation should require schools to control cyber bullying; however, there is much debate on how far school administrators can discipline students without violating a student's right to free speech (Beale & Hall, 2008). Additionally, state lawmakers cannot agree

to the degree of when parents should assume the responsibility for harmful acts committed by their own children.

Prevalence of Bullying

Since the 1960s, researchers have examined conflict resolution programs to understand peer/adolescent interrelationships, antisocial behavior, and victimization; however, empirical data reported over the years lack consistency because of poor definition, weak outcome measures, and deficiently controlled research designs (Garrad & Lipsey, 2007). Research from the United States is more specific to school violence than bullying compared to other countries (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010). The 1980s brought much more attention to bullying, particularly in 1982 when a Norwegian newspaper article reported that three boys committed suicide because of experiencing relentless bullying (Hjort-Larsen, 1982). This event caused a national outcry prompting Daniel Olweus to conduct groundbreaking research collected from 140,000 students in 715 schools, which suggest that 15% of Norwegian children participated in bullying with 6% named bullies and 94% labeled as victims (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Although Olweus researched the bullying phenomenon a decade earlier, it was not until this highly publicized event that other researchers began to scrutinize bullying from an empirical approach (Olweus as cited in Juvonen & Graham, 2001)

Bullying is significantly prevalent in schools worldwide, occurring in all countries and affecting between 9% and 54% of children depending on the study (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Seventy-one percent of students reported they have witnessed bullying in their school (stopbullying.gov, 2019), 30% of U.S. adolescents in Grades 6 through 10 were involved in acts of bullying; 13% were labeled as bullies, 11% as victims, and 6% as bully-victims (Srabstein et

al., 2008). Rates vary among geographical locations, ages of children, gender, and by the type of bullying. Since there is a lack of significant research studies and reliable scholarly material on bullying in the United States, practitioners face many societal and institutional obstacles when pursuing meta-analytical data (Olweus 2001).

Program Implementation to Reduce Bullying

Olweus (as cited in Juvonen & Graham, 2001) stated that, in the 1980s, measuring social status through positive and negative peer interactions was the preferred approach for the study of peer relationships in North America. This approach emphasized the social relationships and environments related to the peer rejection phenomenon, not the behavioral or personality characteristics of the individual child. During the same time, researchers championed programs hoping to improve self-esteem resulting in the reduction of bullying since many believed that the root of bullying manifested itself in low esteem in the bully. However, current research suggests that bullies do not suffer from low self-esteem. On the contrary, many studies support the notion that bullies have a positive and inflated self-image (Graham, 2010). Scandinavian researcher, Daniel Olweus (1994), emphasized that bullies have little anxiety or insecurity, about as much as the average child, but the assumption has been that bullies are insecure. This assumption has been researched and tested using various means including stress hormones and projective methods, however, no significant correlation can be found (Olweus, 1994). Bullies tend to be aggressive toward others as well, including adults and parents.

The challenge that many schools face in choosing and implementing an anti-bullying program is two-fold: (a) there is lack of sufficient data to determine whether a given program is effective, and (b) there is little emphasis placed upon the importance of choosing a program and

how it will align with the demographic needs of the school. Educational practitioners have relied on the adoption of programs spawned from marketing gimmicks, fads, and political pressures without any regard for the strong empirical support (Ertesvag, 2015). This further complicates any genuine attempt to determine what makes an effective program and how schools identify and implement programs suited for their needs. Research indicates that successful school change is a result of positive school culture, however, there is little research available that correlates positive school culture and the successful implementation of a bullying intervention program (Coyle, 2008). Furthermore, types of programs, implementation rates, and levels of fidelity are critical components to determine the efficacy of a program designed to improve a culture within a school environment and how outside factors may influence an initiative's efforts. In a study by Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, and Johnson (2004), schools that did not experience high levels of distress were ones that were organized, academically focused, and placed an emphasis on protective ideologies. They also suggested that the implementation of any anti-bullying program might be dependent on the congruence of the school's readiness to assess needs and the willingness to do what it can to change the school climate to reduce bullying. Positive school culture exhibits a shared sense of what stakeholders believe is important and a shared commitment to student learning (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Additional research by Sugai and Horner (2006) suggested that programs designed to promote a positive school climate also have a positive impact on reducing school bullying and peer victimization.

A multilevel study was conducted by Kallestad and Olweus (2003) with an emphasis on factors that predict or affect differences in a school's implementation of school-based bullying prevention and intervention programs. Two implementation measures were constructed:

intervention measures deployed in classrooms, and individual contact with the bully, the bullied, and/or parents. The study also explored the variability, differences, and the implementation of the program. The degree of fidelity in implementation of a prescribed intervention program relied heavily upon teacher attitudes and experiences. Kallestad and Olweus (2003) stated,

> The main concern of the present study was with the teachers/schools' responses to a specific, circumscribed intervention program offered to the schools/teachers at a particular point in time. To the best of our knowledge, empirical, quantitative studies of factors predicting differences in implementation of a circumscribed intervention program in the personal/social-development area are very scarce. (p. 4, para. 1)

Inasmuch there is limited empirical data regarding the science of program implementation and the affect it can have on a program's success, Kallestad and Olweus (2003) suggested that further inquiry in this area would prove to be beneficial. Other variables that may influence program implementation rates include, but not limited to, teacher efficacy, appropriate skills, values and attitudes, affective involvement, school factors, and communication and orientation to change (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003).

Efficacy of Bullying Prevention Programs

Efforts to identify the frequency and types of bullying have been given significant attention in many schools worldwide; however, the efficacy of intervention programs to mitigate the bullying phenomenon has recently come to the forefront of researchers. Nation-wide studies regarding bullying and the efficacy of anti-bullying efforts are often estimated using data gathered from local and state survey studies (Evans et al., 2014). There has been a considerable increase in bullying awareness and subsequent implementation of intervention-based programs

and an emphasis has been placed upon other factors not related to bullying. Some states have required school districts to adopt policies to identify and address bullying. This heightened awareness has caused an increase in the creation of intervention programs designed for schools, but many school district-wide prevention programs have demonstrated vaguely negligible to insignificant results (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Anti-bullying school-based programs vary in scope and approach. Various programs include interventions that are designed to focus on the bully, the victim, peers, staff, parents, curriculum, and overall school climate (Mishna, 2008). Further consideration has been given to the very nature of individuals or groups intending to implement the program in a manner consistent with its design. Mishna (2008) referred to a 2004 study conducted by Smith, Pepler, and Rigby suggesting that there is the greatest degree of variation in programs where the emphasis of intervention strategies is focused on the bully and the degree of commitment by school personnel responsible for the implementation of the program. Furthermore, commitment itself can present a complexity of biases related to the personal experiences of the staff, the school's financial commitment to the program, and the general support of the administration to vigilantly monitor and evaluate outcomes (Mishna, 2008). Many programming factors exist causing researchers to have become more cognizant of variables that may affect the effectiveness of a bullying intervention program. One such variable is school climate dynamics. Researchers are exploring the correlation and significance of school climate and the impact it has on bullying prevention programs.

Often, school personnel are ill equipped when faced with the responsibility of developing and implementing strategies to reduce instances of bullying in the school setting. The typical

response is to seek an existing and well-established program and have a school conform to its provisions. Moreover, a developmental perspective is gaining momentum as researchers are beginning to realize that one type of intervention strategy may not effectively reduce the instances of bullying at all age levels. Aggressive behavior developed at a young age can increase in intensity and frequency as an individual moves from childhood into adolescence (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011). Killen, Piscane, Lee-Kim, and Ardila-Rey (2001) suggested that children, slightly over age four, express gender bias when engaging in play. A type of relational bullying can occur when a group of boys exclude girls from playing with trucks or footballs or when girls exclude boys when playing with dolls or engaging in domestic role-play. These types of instances provide the opportunity for conflict resolution and use of prompts to stress moral reasoning and to encourage a sense of inclusivity and fairness. Initiating bullying prevention programs to students as young as preschool may set the stage for future interventions where adolescent students may experience other forms of harassment as dating violence and sexual harassment (Mishna, 2008). Intervention is difficult once a culture of bullying is prevalent in the school setting; however, a benefit to a comprehensive program is that it is ongoing and seamless as students progress into the next grade. Unfortunately, the most widely used prevention programs fail due to the lack of integrating basic youth development strategies, and, instead, emphasis is placed upon punitive consequences spawned from ill-conceived zero-tolerance policies (Black, Washington, Trent, Harner, & Pollock, 2010). These punitive consequences often reflect problems associated with racism, gender biases, and other social injustices (Black et al.).

In a re-examination of Farrington's and Ttofi's (2009) meta-analysis of bullying interventions, researchers Evans and colleagues (2014) findings were mixed, however, data suggested that bullying programs implemented outside the United States were more successful than programs implemented in the United States (Evans et al.). These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Farrington and Ttofi (2009).

Educators must understand the dynamics of bullying and help dismiss the myths that have been associated with traditional views and perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders. Self-esteem of the bully should not be the focus of intervention; instead, program design should include strategies for controlling anger and taking responsibility for one's own problem and not blaming others. Children who are chronically harassed are more likely to be rejected by their peer group, the development of positive self-perception intervention is needed for the victim to reinforce the notion that he is not to blame for the bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). Bullying can negatively impact bystanders and a focus should be placed on the development of strategies that seek to change the entire culture and climate of the school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

The expectation for school personnel to prevent bullying typically falls under the notion that educators are responsible for the care, custody, and control of children during school hours; however, there is evidence that they are less effective in this regard for several factors. Although teachers have the most frequent interaction with students, they are seldomly aware of instances of bullying because incidents often occur during unstructured times. In a study by Pepler and Craig (1998), teachers intervened in only 4% of bullying incidents on the playground and in 18% in the classroom (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Students who are bullied have developed a perception that teachers are unable to protect them because direct intervention occurs at a very low rate

(Veenstra et al., 2014). This perception also prevents students from reporting bullying because they believe that nothing will be done about it and will be dismissed by school personnel; if it is addressed, students are fearful of reprisals from the bully.

Teachers may also be viewed as ineffective due to cognitive developmental coping differences between adults and children and often view relational bullying as something other than bullying, i.e., an instance of an act less serious than physical or verbal bullying. Furthermore, teachers expect victims to work through their problems while ignoring the seriousness of bullying, often believing that such incidents are a part of the normative developmental process (Veenstra et al., 2014).

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)

Although bullying was both prevalent and acknowledged, it was not until Olweus' effort to approach the phenomenon in a more practical and systemic manner thus causing a heightened awareness in Scandinavia. Other areas of the world did not yet place emphasis on bullying until the 1980s and 1990s. Olweus has researched bullying for 50 years, as his first large-scale research began in 1970 and was regarded as one of the first known scientific research studies on bullying. This research was published in 1973 in Scandinavia and 1978 in the United States, under the title of *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (Olweus, 2012). In the 1980s, Olweus continued his research on bullying intervention, which resulted in the developmental stage of what would become the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). This research was a catalyst for the implementation of the OBPP in Norway, and, eventually, in other countries including the United States.

In 1989, Olweus called for a reorientation of peer relationship research designed to focus on behavioral or personality characteristics in contrast to reactions caused by social environments (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). The OBPP established school-wide awareness and expectations designed to modify the social norms regarding bullying behavior and mal-acceptance of bullies and bystanders/non-status students. This is evident in the OBPP core beliefs to promote a comprehensive approach targeting individual, classroom, school, and community-level interventions and include dialogue about bullying and other activities designed to engage students with a focus on changing student perceptions and attitudes regarding bullying (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivera, 2007).

The key principle of the OBPP is to underscore the importance of a non-authoritarian, multicomponent, school-wide model where the school climate includes warmth and acceptance while cultivating an atmosphere that will not tolerate hostile and other inappropriate aggressive behaviors. Educators function as positive role models and consequences for bullying are proactive instead of punitive in nature (Olweus et al., 2007). Unfortunately, many schools will use a single component event such as a school-wide assembly to increase bullying awareness. This one-time approach is unlikely to reduce bullying on a long-term and sustained basis (Bradshaw, 2015). Program prevention should focus primarily on stakeholder awareness, climate, consistency of messaging using discussions and lessons in the classroom, and integration into school programs, sustained at all grade levels (Mishna, 2008).

Olweus and Limber (2007) published the following table outlining the general implementation requirements of the OBPP:

Components of Awareness and Involvement of Adults in Schools

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">GENERAL REQUIREMENTS
Generate awareness and involvement on the part of the adults in the school</th></tr>
<tr><td>

SCHOOL-LEVEL COMPONENTS

- Establish a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee.
- Conduct committee and staff trainings.
- Administer the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire schoolwide.
- Hold staff discussion group meetings.
- Introduce the school rules against bullying.
- Review and refine the school's supervisory system.
- Hold a school kick-off event to launch the program.
- Involve parents.

CLASSROOM-LEVEL COMPONENTS

- Post and enforce schoolwide rules against bullying.
- Hold regular class meetings.
- Hold meetings with students' parents.

</td><td>

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL COMPONENTS

- Supervise students' activities.
- Ensure that all staff intervene on the spot when bullying occurs.
- Hold meetings with students involved in bullying.
- Hold meetings with parents of involved students.
- Develop individual intervention plans for involved students.

COMMUNITY-LEVEL COMPONENTS

- Involve community members on the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee
- Develop partnerships with community members to support your school's program.
- Help to spread anti-bullying messages and principles of best practice in the community.

</td></tr>
</table>

The OBPP was first evaluated as a longitudinal study that followed 2,500 Norwegian schoolchildren between 1983-1985.

> The researchers did not conduct an experimental study with schools or classes assigned randomly to treatment or controlled conditions, but instead, extended selection cohorts were used as same-aged children from the same schools were compared spanning three points in time (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 126).

The empirical research revealed significant reductions in student self-reporting of bullying incidents after an 8-month period. Children experienced a 62% decrease in being bullied, and bullies bullying other children decreased by 33%; after a 20-month period, the decrease was 64% and 52.6%, respectfully (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

Similar evaluation studies of the OBPP have occurred in rural South Carolina, suburban California, inner-city Pennsylvania, and Washington State. In the mid-1990s, South Carolina was the location of the first OBPP evaluation in the U.S. The study consisted of "elementary and middle schools in six rural school districts of low socioeconomic status spanning over a seven-month period. Results revealed a 16% decrease in students who reported that they had bullied someone" (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 128).

The remaining states conducted the evaluation studies in 2007 and found similar results. Three suburban community schools were used in Southern California over a three-year period. In the first year, self-reports of being bullied decreased by 21% after the first year, and 14% after the second year, and an 8% reduction was self-reported by bullies who bullied others, a 17% reduction, after two years. In Pennsylvania, six inner-city schools in Philadelphia were studied, and, within a four-year period, bullying incidents' density decreased by 45%. In Washington

State, ten middle schools were used: seven intervention and three control. The research uncovered significant program effects for white students but did not show similar effects for minority students (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

The OBPP has been the most widely researched bullying prevention program due to large-scale studies in Norway. Several of these Norwegian studies revealed compelling evidence that the OBPP resulted in reductions in student self-reporting of bullying incidents in schools. Although studies in Norway appear to be promising, studies conducted in the U.S. have not been similarly consistent and show only moderate improvement in student self-reporting (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Bauer et al. (2007) suggested that a developmental stage of adolescence is one where children attempt to discover or form their own identity and in a homogeneous society may be less difficult to do so. In diverse settings such as in the U.S., children are influenced more by experiences and attitudes toward others, in part, because of ethnic differences. Since the OBPP was developed for a homogeneous population like Norway, its application in more diverse populations like the U.S. would have a diminished impact on the reduction of bullying.

Olweus and Limber (2010) also suggested that the challenges in OBPP program dissemination unique to U.S. schools are related to the schools' and staffs' readiness to implement the program with fidelity. They found some staff resistance due to their belief that bullying was not a critical concern and that any incident of bullying was viewed as a rite of passage, a type of valuable learning experience for developing children. The attitudes of educational leaders must not allow apathetic attitudes to prevail. As with any educational programming success, a buy-in type of mentality with staff is critical.

Methods

This research will answer the following questions:

1. Do teachers in districts using the OBPP perceive that the program was implemented with fidelity?
2. Do these teachers report improvement in the relationship/interactions between bullies, victims, bully-victims, and non-status students because of the OBPP programming?
3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding program support and sustainability?
4. What potential moderators impact teachers' perceptions regarding the OBPP programming? Moderators include time, training, gender of teacher, years of experience, age of teacher, size of building, and topology.

Participants

The current investigation includes K-12 educators who have received training and have OBPP implemented in their school. The sampling frame of educator invited to participate in the research is 1,557. These educators were all located in NE Ohio.

Instrumentation

Survey questions were used for this research.

- Questions 1-11 asked participants to provide basic demographic information about themselves and whether the district prescribes to positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and a bullying prevention program.
- Questions 12-31 were developed using the components of awareness and involvement of adults in schools when implementing the OBPP. These leveled components include school, classroom, individual, and community.

- Questions 32-34 were developed to answer the research questions for the current investigation. These items aimed to understand the impact of bullying prevention programs based on the participants' earlier responses.
- Questions 35-39 were developed to answer the research questions of support from district and building level administration, peer teachers, parents, and students.
- Questions 40-42 were developed to answer the questions about teachers' perceptions as it relates to increased or decreased instances of bullying and whether they perceive the bullying prevention program is valuable.

The complete survey is available at https://bit.ly/3GjS0CD.

Procedures

A pilot survey was created and distributed to nineteen teachers: six elementary school teachers, six middle, six high, and one traveling teacher who is assigned to several buildings. They were asked to complete a hardcopy of the survey while tracking the time it took to complete and to give consideration concerning any perceived ambiguity regarding any of the questions. After collecting the completed surveys, the completion times were averaged to be 12 minutes with no one reporting any ambiguity with any of the questions. The researcher submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol application, letter of consent, and the survey to the Youngstown State University (YSU) IRB to gain approval to proceed with this research. Contact was made with a Stark County Educational Service Center representative who agreed to send an email to Stark County teachers consisting of the consent form and survey along with an explanation of the scope and intent of the study. The survey was developed through a Survey Monkey platform and was accessible for a two-week period. The representative of the Stark

County Educational Service Center followed-up with a second email reminding them that access to the survey will be available for one more week. At the end of the two-week period, 205 OBPP participants completed the survey for a 19% response rate.

Results

The OBPP program was reported to be used by 68.1% of the participants. There were 205 teachers in the sample that currently use the OBPP program. The 205 teachers represent 13.1% of the population of 1,557 teachers. Basic descriptive statistics indicate that n= 79 (26.2%) of the participants report that they are male, while n= 221 of the participants report that they are female. The reported age of the respondents suggest that 78.4 percent are between the ages of 30-59, while younger respondents, ages 20-29 represent 13.3%, and older respondents over the age of sixty represent 7.6%. Participants indicate that they teach in urban (41.2%) districts, rural (35.2%) districts and suburban (22.3%) districts. Additionally, 91.4% indicate that they teach in public schools, 2.3% in private schools, and 6.3% in Parochial schools. Eighty percent of educators have been teaching for more than five years. Educators represented the full range of grade levels, including pre-kindergarten (1.3%), K-3 (20.6), 4-5th grades (13.3%), 6th -8th grade (40.2%), and 9th-12th grades (13.3%). Eleven percent of the participants indicated that they teach multiple grades.

Research Question 1 asked, "*Do teachers in districts using the OBPP perceive that the program was implemented with fidelity?"* Table 1 provides reliability estimates for participant responses across the four implementation level components, as well as the average level of response for each of the factors.

Table 1

Average response and Reliability Estimate of Response for Each Factor

Factor	Mean	SD	α
Community Level	2.82	0.87	0.90
Individual Level	3.06	0.53	0.73
Classroom Level	2.85	0.76	0.70
School Level	3.15	0.64	0.80

As indicated above, levels of reliability are acceptable. The greatest area of endorsement for use is the classroom level followed by the individual level. All levels were endorsed above 2.5 which indicates that the responses were positive (above average). Pearson's zero-order correlations between the factors are in Table 2.

Table 2

Pearson's Zero-Order Correlations between the Factors

Variable	1	2	3	4
Community Level (1)	-	.221**	.402**	.473**
Individual Level (2)	-	-	.357**	.232**
Classroom Level (3)	-	-	-	.466**
School Level (4)	-	-	-	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As seen in Table 2, the four factors are positively related to each other with the strongest correlation existing between Classroom Level and School Level followed by Classroom Level and Community Level.

Research Question 2 asked, "*Do these teachers report improvement in the relationship/interactions between bullies, bully-victims, and non-status student as a result of the OBPP programming?"* Table 3 presents the distribution of responses regarding bullying incidents in the classroom and the entire school. As indicated in Table 3, most respondents indicated a decrease at the classroom level (51.7%). Additionally, most respondents indicated a reduction in bully incidence throughout the school (42.2%). Research Question 3 asked, "*What are teachers' perceptions regarding program support and sustainability?"* Reliability estimate of the responses to these five items indicates good consistency, α=.89, based on Cronbach Alpha analysis.

Table 3

Bullying Incidents in Classroom and School

Questions	Significantly Increased	Increased	No Change	Decreased	Significantly Decreased
Have bullying incidents in your classroom:	0.5	5.9	33.2	41	10.7
Have bullying incidents in the entire school:	1.5	8.3	23.4	36.1	6.3

The support response data is in Table 4.

Table 4

To what degree do you feel your bullying prevention efforts supported?

	Sig Not	Not Supported	Supported	Sig Support
by school district level administration?	2	9.3	49.3	28.3
by your principal(s)?	0.5	3.4	46.3	36.1
by peer teachers?	0.5	2.9	52.2	29.3
by parents of your students?	1.5	11.2	53.2	8.8
by your students?	1.0	7.3	60.5	10.2

As indicated in Table 4, the respondents indicated that they are supported by the district administration, building principals, and peer teachers. Additionally, respondents were asked, "*Do you have the support needed to sustain the bullying prevention program in your school?"* Responses indicate that 73.9% agree that they do receive support to sustain.

Research Question 4 asked, "*What potential moderators impact teachers' perceptions regarding the OBPP programming? Moderators include time, training, gender of teacher, years of experience, age of teacher, size of building, and topology."* A multiple regression analysis was conducted after creating a Support Score based on the teacher average responses to the five support items. The regression analysis was used to understand the variance explained in the teacher's level of reported support based on their age, years of experience, number of students in the school, type of district working in, and whether the school offered training. Results indicate that these moderators explain 25.2% of the variance in teachers' reported level of support, F (5, 177) = 11.90, p <.001. Specifically, the data indicate that male teachers report slightly higher

levels of feeling supported (2.21) relative to female educators (2.12). Younger teachers (ages 20-29 and 30-39) as well as teachers with the least amount of experience (0-5 and 6-10 years) report the highest level of feeling supported for the bullying intervention. Educators from the urban districts (2.31) followed by the rural district (2.09) feel more supported than the educators in the Suburban districts (1.91). There was no difference in the level of support reported by educators from public, private, or parochial schools. Educators who most recently experienced the implementation of the bullying program report the highest levels of support (less than two years and 2 to 4 years) relative to those whose program was implemented five or more years ago.

Discussion and Implications

After the review of scholarly literature and data collection, synthesis of information is presented below:

Demographical data revealed that most respondents identify as public school, mid-career, teachers, with an average age range of 30 to 49 serving in middle schools with an enrollment of 300-999 students. Respondents identified their districts as rural (35.2%), suburban (22.3%), urban (41.2%), and unknown (1%) providing a good cross-section of district location.

Response to Survey Questions

"Do teachers in districts using the OBPP perceive that the program was implemented with fidelity?" Since the OBPP is a multicomponent program having protocols for implementation, the researcher created a survey question asking, "*How many years ago was the bullying prevention program implemented?"* This question attempted to identify districts that have had a minimum of two years for OBPP implementation. Time was not considered a variable for fidelity for initial implementation because only schools with two or more years using the

OBPP were part of the sample, however, time was for the teacher moderators impacting sustainability perceptions. Sixty-two percent responded that implementation occurred more than two years ago. Additionally, a teacher who is more confident in his or her ability to manage a program is also more likely to implement a program with a high level of fidelity (Dusenbury et al.; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Self-reported confidence was not a moderator considered in this study.

When considering the four levels of implementation, the survey results indicated a positive relationship between classroom and school level components followed by classroom and community level. *"Do these teachers report improvement in the relationship/interactions between bullies, victims, bully-victims, and non-status students as a result of the OBPP programming?"* Survey questions 34-35 asked participants whether bullying incidents have increased or decreased in the classroom and the entire school since the implementation of the OBPP. Most respondents, 51.7%, believe that the OBPP programming has resulted in a decrease or significant decrease of bullying in the classroom, whereas 33.2% indicated no change. When asked about whether bullying has increased or decreased in the entire school setting, 42.4% responded that bullying decreased or significantly decreased. Survey question 41 also asked, "*Do you believe that the bullying prevention program is reducing the incidents of bullying in your school?"* and 61% of the respondents perceived that there was a reduction or a significant reduction in bullying incidents. These results suggest that teachers perceive that the OBPP has had a significant impact of the reduction of bullying incidents both in the classroom and school settings. These results are promising, however more data are needed concerning the developmental level of the students. Researchers are beginning to realize that one program may

not be developmentally appropriate for all grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Furthermore, Kasen, Berenson, and Cohen (2004) concluded that schools that did not have high levels of distress were ones that were academically focused and emphasized protective ideologies. Although this can be considered a responsibility of all stakeholders in a school building, much of culture and climate is a result of the effectiveness of building leadership and a shared sense of what is important for student learning (Peterson & Deal, 1998). This research did not gauge whether the respondents believed that their building was academically focused or exhibited protective ideologies, although an argument can be made that protective ideologies are exhibited using a bullying prevention program.

The issue of sustainability was addressed by asking, "*Do you have the support needed to sustain the bullying prevention program in your school?"* to which 73.9% agreed that they did. Mishna (2008) stressed the importance of commitment to a bullying prevention program. Commitment can present an array of issues from the perspective of different stakeholders. For example, staff commitment can be influenced by personal biases, school administration by budgetary constraints, and general challenges for all as it relates to training time and effort necessary to discharge the program properly. Respondents did suggest that lack of time and a negligence to sustain the program through ongoing training stifled the progress of the program.

"What potential moderators impact teachers' perceptions regarding the OBPP programming? Moderators include time, training, gender of teacher, years of experience, age of teacher, size of building, and topology." Teachers who most recently participated in the implementation process, within two to four years ago, reported the highest levels of support relative to those whose program was implemented five or more years ago.

Limitations

All survey research is subject to how the respondents interpret the questions. This self-reporting can have varying and unintended results. No inquiry was used to gauge how the respondents defined bullying nor was there any way to solicit differences regarding individual experiences or prejudices. The survey was sent to 1,557 teachers resulting in 205 teachers indicated that they use the OBPP. Therefore, only 205 survey results were analyzed for a 13.1% sample size. The sample size is small considering that over 1,256 teachers decided not to participate in the study. The OBPP is used worldwide and while the focus of this research included only a small cross-section of respondents from NE Ohio, the data results cannot be considered universal or applied without prudence to other regions.

Additionally, the impetus of the OBPP in Stark County was the result of a grant awarded to the participating schools. As with most grants, a strong adherence to an outside funding source may have caused the participants to be more vigilant in their attempt to implement the program than if the OBPP was funded by their own district. Could the implementation fidelity level be higher in Stark County than other school districts using the OBPP due to external requirements and oversight?

Recommendations for Practice

To create a safer environment for school children to feel secure and grow, educators must be aware of the climate and culture of their school buildings and facilitate positive interactions between students. School culture is a significant and powerful component to the success or failure to provide an appropriate environment for children to learn (Peterson & Deal, 1998). This responsibility falls on the shoulders of all stakeholders especially teachers and administrators

serving children in their school buildings. Through this research, the following points should be considered in improving the likelihood of reducing and mitigating incidents of bullying:

- School personnel should find means by which to gauge the perceptions of all stakeholders as it relates to school culture. Stakeholders should include students, parents, faculty, staff, and administration. Age-appropriate surveys can be used to solicit feedback from stakeholders and can be reviewed for emerging themes;
- School leaders should collect and review data on bullying prevention programs and share findings with parents and teachers. Further discussion should occur to decide what program best fits school and student needs;
- Bullying prevention programs should be implemented the way they have been suggested by the creator of the program. This includes kick-off events, messaging, training techniques, parental involvement, student activities, and evaluating the progress of the program. Deviation from its directives may increase the chance of inconsistency. Although the data suggest that the teachers feel a sense of support from peers, the research also revealed that teachers were critical of the inconsistencies that exist in how their peers dealt with bullying incidents;
- Sampson (2009) stated 66% of victims believe that school personnel mishandle incidents of bullying causing students not to report bullying issues. This realization should result in the creation of confidential pathways for students to report bullying;
- Educators function as positive role models and consequences for bullying are proactive instead of punitive in nature (Olweus et al., 2007). Program prevention should focus primarily on stakeholder awareness, climate, consistency of messaging using discussions and

lessons in the classroom, and integration into school programs, sustained at all grade levels (Mishna, 2008);

- An emphasis should be placed upon sustainability as many bullying prevention programs consist of a single component event such as a school-wide assembly to increase bullying awareness. This one-time approach is unlikely to reduce bullying on a long-term and sustained basis (Bradshaw, 2015);
- The key principle of the OBPP is to underscore the importance of a non-authoritarian, multicomponent, school-wide model where the school climate includes warmth and acceptance while cultivating an atmosphere that will not tolerate hostile and other inappropriate aggressive behaviors; and
- Frequent checks and debriefing should occur with stakeholders to keep a pulse on how the program is working.

Recommendations for Future Research

Kallestad and Olweus (2003) stated that there is sparse empirical data regarding factors that may affect bully-prevention program implementation. Coyle (2008) endorsed the notion that successful school change is a result of positive school culture, however, there is little research available that correlates positive school culture and the successful implementation of a bullying intervention program. Moreover, programming implementation rates and degree of fidelity are just a few components worth further scrutiny. Further research should include an emphasis on factors that predict or affect differences in a school's implementation rate of a prescribed intervention program and the moderators that influence bullying attitudes and experiences of the implementer.

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