

Interventions for Bullying: A Look at “Real World” Practices



Bullying is increasingly recognized as a serious problem in schools. One study estimated that around 36% of students experience some form of bullying while in elementary or secondary school¹. Given the seriousness of this issue, it is important that schools know how to effectively prevent and address bullying.

Policies and Interventions Addressing Bullying

As of 2010, 45 of the 50 states in the United States have some sort of anti-bullying legislation². Whereas these laws represent an important recognition of the problem of bullying, they often do not give any specific guidelines on how to address bullying³. Reviews of research studies on bullying interventions have found that most anti-bullying programs are not very effective at actually decreasing bullying in schools^{4, 5}. Only two programs, the Olweus’ Bullying Prevention^{6, 7} program and the / Second Step / Steps to Respect program^{8, 9, 10, 11}, have been shown to have an effect in reducing bullying in some schools. Despite the effectiveness of these bullying interventions, prior studies of bullying intervention strategies used by school psychologists and school counselors suggest that the bullying intervention strategies used in schools are often informal interventions that research has not shown to work, such as zero tolerance policies or group interventions for students who bully others^{12, 13, 14}. Therefore, more research on bullying interventions is needed.

Purpose of This Study

One objective of the Professional Practices Related to Bullying study was to examine what anti-bullying intervention strategies and programs are currently being used by school psychologists and school counselors, the type of training they received to implement these interventions; and to understand how those interventions were selected. To answer these questions, we surveyed 602 school counselors and school psychologists nationally using an online survey.

Results

- ◆ Eighty-one percent of the respondents reported receiving some training in preventing bullying, with 58% reporting training in implementing an anti-bullying program specifically.
- ◆ Fifty-nine percent reported that their school had an anti-bullying program.
- ◆ District or school administrators were most likely to select the programs used in schools, not school counselors or school psychologists.
- ◆ The most common sources used when choosing a program were staff training from in-services, books, and recommendations from colleagues; less than half used journal articles or databases listing evidenced-based interventions.

Conclusions and Implications

Most school psychologists and school counselors surveyed received some type of anti-bullying training, and most of their schools had an anti-bullying program of some kind in place. Administrators often chose the anti-bullying programs used and thus should be trained in and keep up to date in anti-bullying research and practices. If possible, school psychologists and counselors, who serve experts in school-based mental health, should consult with school administrators when anti-bullying programs are selected. More research is needed to understand how school and district administrators select anti-bullying programs.

Among the school psychologists and school counselors who responded to our survey, research articles were not usually used when choosing a program. This may mean that recent research in bullying interventions is not taken into account when making selections.

When interpreting the results of this survey, it is important to note that our sample represented primarily the north east and elementary schools, so results may not be fully representative of national practices

across grade levels. Further research should be conducted in order to better understand anti-bullying intervention practices in middle and high schools and in other geographic regions.

Overall, this study provides valuable information on current anti-bullying practices used in schools and lays a foundation for future research examining how to better translate anti-bullying intervention research into effective and feasible school-based practice.

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Disclosures

Portions of this research were presented at the National Association of School Psychologists Texas Association of School Psychology annual conventions and also are currently in preparation for publication.¹⁵

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PRA Lab

The Peer Relations Adjustment Lab is a research team directed by Dr. Jamilia Blake at Texas A&M University. For more information about our lab and what we do or for additional resources, please visit our website at: www.pralab.tamu.edu or

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