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Hernandez, Astrid; Davila, Gaby; and Hanna, Mariam, "Understanding Factors related to Bystander Intervention in Bullying" (2020). Student Research Symposium. 11.
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Understanding Factors related to Bystander Intervention in Bullying
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Introduction

Bullying is identified as intended physical or psychological harm by an individual or group to a less powerful peer. This harm can be the repeated act of physical, verbal, relational, or electronic aggression (Nickerson et al., 2014).

- 20.25% of youth are involved in some type of bullying, either as perpetrators, victims, or both (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).
- Bullying in school begins to take place in elementary school but its prevalence drops after middle school (Ali, Gharabib, & Masadeh, 2017).
- 37% of students experience bullying with high reports (85%) of it taking place inside the school (Ali, Gharabib, & Masadeh, 2017).

**Bystanders:** Students who witness the bullying.
- **Defender:** the individual that helps/supports the victim.
- **Outsider:** the individual on the outside who either ignores or does not intervene in the bullying or assistance of bullying.
- **Assistant:** the individual that helps and/or part takes in the bullying.

- Witnesses intervene less than 20% of the time which makes it important to understand the factors that make youth more likely to intervene or defend during bullying (Nickerson et al., 2014).
- Victimization episodes are witnessed by peers approximately 80% of the time, yet students report that they intervene and attempt to stop bullying only 20% of the time (Jenkins et al., 2018).
- Once there is active interference by a bystander, 60% of bullying episodes stop within a 10 second period (Hawkins et al., 2000).

**Bystander Intervention Model (Latane & Darley, 1970):**

- **Expects what bystanders do or do not intervene to help victims of bullying.**
- **Characterized by five specific steps:**
  - Noticing the event – focusing the attention to the problem.
  - Bystanders attention is more likely to be drawn with vivid events, or those with specific, and identifiable victims.
  - Interpreting if it is an emergency – that there is in need of assistance.
  - Accepting responsibility for intervening – an individual would assume that others will intervene or take action when bystanders are present.
  - Knowing the steps or having the skills to intervene – individual can intervene effectively when they know what actions need to be taken.

- **Implementing the plan**
- **Studies that focused on gender have shown mixed data.**
  - One supported the idea that when in a bullying situation, girls defend more than boys (Ma, 2002; Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008).
  - Another study showed boys defended more in bullying situations (Nickerson & Mele-Taylor, 2014).
  - Other studies have been unable to find differences between genders in the bystander intervention model (O’Connell et al., 1999; Rigby & Johnson, 2006).

Research Questions

1. Are there gender differences in the different stages of bystander intervention?

2. Are there grade level differences in the different stages of bystander intervention?

Materials

**Bystander Intervention Model (Nickerson, Aloe, Livingston, & Feeley, 2014):**

- Assessed the five steps a bystander must use to respond to an event: Notice the situation, Interpret the event as an emergency that requires assistance, Accept Responsibility, Plan to intervene, and Lastly, Intervene in the event. Participants in the current study asked 12 items to analyze how much they agreed with various statements at each stage of bystander intervention. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree,” in response to the statements.

**Demographic Questionnaire:**

- Assessed gender, grade and ethnicity of participants.

Participants and Procedure

199 students from fifth to eighth grade participated in the study.

- 57% Male and 42% Female
- 20% Fifth, 26% Sixth, 24% Seventh, and 29% Eighth grade
- 34.31% White, 30.88% Hispanic or Latinx, 15.20% Other, 7.35% Multiracial, 6.86% Asian, 3.92% Black or African American, and 1.47% American Indian or Alaska Native

A school-wide online survey was distributed to the students as part of a school-wide bullying assessment to support school improvement planning. An opt out consent approach was used. Qualtrics was used to collect and analyze all data.

Participants were awarded pencils for their participation in the study.

Results

One Two-way MANOVAs was conducted to investigate whether there are Gender and Grade level differences in the Five Steps of Bystander Intervention.

- The Two-way MANOVAs revealed a marginally significant multivariate main effect of Gender in Bystander Intervention, λ = .936, F(5, 160) = 2.194, p = .057. There was a significant multivariate main effect of Grade, λ = .815, F(5, 442) = 2.27, p = .004.
- Significant main effects of Gender were found for the Notice (F(1, 160) = 5.337, p = .022) and Interpret (F(1, 160) = 5.701, p = .018) scales. Girls scored significantly higher on the Notice and the Interpret scales.
- There was a significant Grade level difference between Know (F(3,160) = 4.876, p = .003) and Intervention (F(3, 160) = 4.438, p = .005) scales.

- Post hoc analyses found that 5th grade students were significantly different from all other grades on both the Know and the Intervene scales, with 5th graders reporting higher scores than all other grades.

Discussion

- Female students are more likely than their male peers to notice a bullying event and interpret the event as an emergency.
- Girls have often been found to have a higher ability to recognize the harm of bullying and sympathizing with victims (i.e. moral sensitivity), and lower moral disengagement than males (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).
- Greater empathy in females is likely linked to their ability to notice and interpret a bullying event, increasing empathy in males will likely increase their knowledge in these two steps (Menolascino, N., & Jenkins 2018).
- Fifth-grade students are more likely to know what to do in a bullying situation and intervene than older middle school students.
- Older students who are less supervised may need to be provided with more social-emotional support to increase self-efficacy as a way to know how to protect themselves and others from bullying situations (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009).

Implications and Future Directions

- Male students would benefit from training in recognizing bullying and having more empathy for victims.
- Studies should look into interventions that increase moral-sensitivity and social-emotional support particularly in older students.
- Impact of socialization patterns on grade level differences in grade level differences.

Limitations

- Small Sample Size
- Self-report questionnaire
- Class structure differences