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Bullying Prevention: How to Foster Positive Interactions Among Elementary Aged Youth

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Elementary Aged Youth

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Abstract

Bullying Prevention: How to Foster Positive Interactions Among Elementary Aged

Youth

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Bullying has been identified as one of the most widespread forms of violence encountered in U.S. schools, with 30% of children reporting being the victims of bullying sometime during their lives, and approximately 10% reporting being victimized on a regular basis. This research sought to identify common threads that seem important for individuals working with children in school settings to be aware of in order to effectively prevent and respond to bullying based on current prevention efforts and curriculum a sample of Minnesota schools are currently utilizing. A qualitative research design was used to obtain data from a sample of seven school social workers, and data reduction was used to interpret the findings. The findings indicated the importance of social skill development among students, the use of formal and informal curriculum and programming, community building and active supervision, and the bystander effect. The findings speak to the importance of school staff to create a positive school climate, utilize curriculum and other individualized interventions, develop positive relationships with students, increase the level of adult supervision within the schools, and ensure consistent expectations and common language throughout the school in order to effectively prevent and intervene when children are involved in bullying.

Keywords: bullying, prevention, elementary aged youth, curriculum

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Youth

Bullying is one of the most widespread forms of violence encountered in U.S.

schools (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). School violence victims may experience physical and

psychological harm at the hands of a perpetrator. The perpetrator, also referred to as a

bully, makes repetitive attempts to cause physical and/or psychological harm to an

individual perceived to be weak (Mizrahi & Davis, 2012). Victims of bullying may have

difficulty in school, experience suicidal ideations, suffer from depression, have reduced

feelings of well being, and suffer from long-term emotional, academic, and behavioral

problems (Mizrahi & Davis, 2012; Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). This research

will examine the experience of being bullied by peers in school, and how educators,

social workers, parents, and other professionals working with and raising youth, can

prevent bullying and foster positive interactions among youth in elementary, middle, and

high school.

Bullying is defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior that is repetitive in nature,

and involves one party having and/or exerting power over another party. When one party

has or is perceived to have more power, possibly based on popularity, physical strength,

or the ability to use information about an individual against them, they are in the position

to harm and control peers [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS),

2013]. The Department of Health and Human Services identifies three types of bullying:

verbal, social/relational, and physical. Verbal bullying includes teasing, name-calling,

inappropriate comments, taunting and threats. Social/relational bullying includes

purposefully leaving people out, telling others not to hang out with someone, spreading

rumors, and publicly humiliating someone. Physical bullying includes: acts of violence such as hitting or kicking, spitting, pushing, taking someone's things, and making obscene gestures at someone (DHHS, 2013). Smokowksi and Kopasz (2005) identify a fourth type of bullying, reactive, where the individual will encourage others to fight, fight back, but then claim self-defense.

Overall, approximately 30% of children are the victims of bullying sometime during their lives, and approximately 10% are victimized on a regular basis (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Newman, Holden, & Delville, 2004). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 31.7 percent of students aged 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school in 2007, with school being defined as on school grounds, on a school bus, and going to and from school. The numbers were highest in the sixth grade, with 42.7 percent of students reporting being bullied, and tended to decline through middle school and high school, with 23 percent of twelfth graders reporting experiencing some form of bullying (2012). Bullying was looked at in terms of being made fun of, called names, or insulted (21 %), being the subject of rumors (18.1%), threatened with harm (5.8%), pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on (11.0%), and cyber-bullying (3.7%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Bullying effects students across the nation, with a study in Australia finding that of 25,000 children surveyed, one in seven children are bullied at school at least once a week (Rigby, 2000).

Children who are bullied may suffer from adverse effects socially, academically, emotionally, and long-term (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Newman et al., 2004). Children may struggle with low self-esteem and self-worth, and have difficulty making and maintaining friendships, causing further

isolation and loneliness due to lack of a peer support network (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Children may feel unsafe at school due to the fear that they may be victimized at any time, and suffer from increased school problems including truancy, an overall dislike of school, deterioration of academic performance, and dropout (Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). It has been estimated that approximately 160,000 children stay home each day due to the fear of being bullied at school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Children and adolescents who are repetitively victimized in school are more likely to bring weapons to school in order to foster a sense of protection, and in extreme cases, may resort to acts of retribution, including murder of perpetrators and peers (Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).   In the book *Nineteen Minutes*, by Jodi Picoult, the author discusses the life of Peter Houghton, a boy who was bullied from elementary school through high school. The end result: Peter kills 10 students, injures 29 others, and eventually takes his own life, claiming this was his main intention all along. While this was a fictional account of a troubled individual, and had an ending that was by no means justified, it depicted the life of students who are teased and tormented throughout school, and the negative effects that this has on self-worth, self-esteem, and the ability to relate to others.

In an effort to create a safe environment for youth at school, many schools have bullying prevention programs in place, and utilize various techniques and strategies on a daily basis to attempt to alleviate the occurrence of bullying. Prevention efforts within the school have often utilized anti-bullying programs and curriculum such as Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the bullying project, and Bully-Busters, in which curriculum focuses on multilevel interventions, teaching students how to handle bullying,

and utilizing skits to teach appropriate responses to bullying (Padgett & Notar, 2013;

Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). In instances where these

programs have been evaluated, it has been reported that there was a substantial decrease

in the occurrence of bullying. Results, however, have been inconsistent, and many of the

programs have not been formally evaluated (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Informal

prevention and intervention efforts have included working to increase social support for

victims of bullying, educating bystanders on the importance of intervening, using

behavioral contracts, social skills groups, counseling for both victims and offenders, and

utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach (Rigby, 2000; Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted &

Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Social workers play a key role in working to prevent bullying among youth in

schools. It is important that social workers are actively working to ensure all staff and

students are aware of bullying including what this looks like, how to respond if a child is

being bullied, and how to ensure that children know that bullying will not be tolerated.

Social workers have the opportunity to work with teachers, administrators, and other

school personnel to encourage the implementation of school-wide programs that focus on

positive peer relationships, and send the message that negative action of any kind toward

classmates will not be tolerated. Social workers should attempt to identify and seek-out

victims of bullying in order to provide them with support, normalize the experience, and

work on a plan to prevent further occurrences of bullying.

Due to the prevalence of bullying in schools, and the negative effects it has on a

child's view of oneself, it is important to examine how to best counteract this problem

among youth. This research examines anti-bullying efforts currently being utilized in

Minnesota schools to determine what a sample of schools are doing to prevent bullying,

whether these schools are utilizing anti-bullying curriculum, and the perceived

effectiveness of prevention efforts. This research offers insight on which curriculum and

anti-bullying efforts appear to be most effective at promoting positive interactions among

youth and decreasing the occurrence of bullying among peers from the perspective of

school social workers. This research attempts to identify common threads that seem

important for individuals working with children to be aware of in order to effectively

prevent and respond to bullying based on current prevention efforts and curriculum a

sample of Minnesota schools are currently utilizing.

Review of Literature

Children are affected by bullying on a daily basis, with the majority of instances

occurring at school, through direct and indirect measures meant to harm the intended

victim. Due to the prevalence of bullying, it is important to examine what bullying is, the

effects of bullying on the victim, bullying in schools and the role of the bystander, and

how to prevent the occurrence of bullying in schools and to support positive interactions

among peers.

Bullying

Research has defined bullying as causing intentional harm to an individual, also

referred to as the victim, through the use of repeated, unprovoked, and aggressive

physical or psychological abuse (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Victims are

often selected due to their perceived weakness and vulnerability, traits that are often

exploited through an ongoing cycle of harassment and abuse (Rigby, 2000; Whitted &

Dupper, 2005). Bullies may have a sense of what is most harmful to their victim, and

will fixate on certain traits that are likely to be the most detrimental when pointed out, such as weight, learning disabilities, and physical impairments (Newman, Holden, & Delville, 2005; Ramirez, 2013).

Bullying has been categorized into the following five forms: physical, verbal, relational, reactive, and cyber-bullying, with physical, relational, and verbal bullying being the most predominant forms.   Physical bullying includes hitting, punching, physical assaults with weapons and chairs, and other acts of aggression intended to cause pain and injury. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, swearing, threats, and teasing another peer. Relational bullying has been defined in terms of excluding others, telling others not to be friends with a certain person, and spreading malicious gossip (Rigby, 2000; Padgett & Notar, 2013; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) defined reactive bullying in terms of when an individual will attempt to provoke others to illicit a reaction, defend him/herself from any resulting attacks, and claim victimization and self-defense following the altercation.   Research has also described individuals who alternate between bullying and victimization, referred to as a victim/bully (Harlow & Roberts, 2010; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). Cyber-bullying, which involves using technology such as social media sites and online correspondence to intentionally harm others, has received more attention in recent years due to the expansion of technology. While this type of bullying has increased with the advancement of technology, it remains less prevalent than the other forms of bullying discussed (Ramirez, 2013).

Bullying has been found to differ between boys and girls with research showing that boys are more likely to use physical means to illicit a response from the victim, while

girls are more likely to cause harm through indirect means, such as exclusion (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Craig, 1998; Mishna, 2004). Craig (1998) found that males tend to use increased physical aggression in elementary school to cause harm to peers. He found that physical aggression declined with age, while verbal aggression increased with age. Verbal aggression was prevalent among both males and females as they transitioned from elementary school to middle/junior school. Mishna (2004) also saw a greater instance of indirect aggression among girls, specifically in the form of name-calling, gossiping, and spreading rumors.

Bullying usually occurs in specific locations at specific times, and is prevalent in non-structured settings, such as the lunchroom, locker room, and hallways, where there tends to be little to no supervision (Ramirez, 2013; Biggs, Simpson, & Gaus, 2009). Research by Ramirez (2013), which followed five students selected based on their history of peer victimization, found that they were targeted when the teacher was not looking or paying attention, when they were in the lunchroom, outside for recess, or in other settings were there was not direct adult oversight and monitoring of behaviors. Instances of aggressive behavior between peers have often been looked at as a normal part of growing up, and minimized or overlooked by parents, teachers, and others in an authority position. A lack of response by adults does not allow the experience of the victim to be validated, and may leave them feeling as though they deserved to be bullied (Mishna, 2004; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). Padgett & Notar (2013) noted that adults might foster both bullying personalities and victim behavior through their interactions with youth, and response to perceived or known instances of bullying. There has been a shift in recent years

surrounding the need to report bullying instead of referring to it as kids just playing around.

Bullying is often used as a way to define status among peers. Children and adolescents may use aggression to establish social prominence and promote their own social position by targeting peers who are often alone, or members of groups deemed to be unpopular. Pointing out vulnerability in others may be seen as a way to reduce the chance that vulnerability will be discovered in oneself, thus reinforcing the need to assert dominance over peers on a continued basis (Estell et al., 2008). It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between bullying among peers and power struggles in friendships, as both use power to obtain a desired outcome (Mishna, 2004).

Individuals who bully do so with the intention of harming another person, and have been found to enjoy hurting and/or scaring peers. There is often little to no guilt experienced by the perpetrator, and the increased anxiety or reaction displayed by the victim reinforces continued attacks. Bullying has been looked at as a form of marginalization, attempting to socially isolate individuals and ensure their insignificance, and can have devastating effects on those who are being bullied (Mishna, 2004; Mongan, Smith-Hatcher, & Maschi, 2009; Craig, 1998).

Effects of Bullying

Bullying can lead to lasting and detrimental effects among those who have been and continue to be victimized. Research has discussed that individuals who are bullied often struggle with low self-esteem, depression, loneliness, suicidal ideation, and reduced feelings of well being (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Biggs, 2009). Slee (1999) surveyed children in Australia, and found that children

who identified as a victim reported they felt like crying, running away, were very lonely, and extremely sad. Studies show a strong association between victimization and increased depression, decreased self-worth, feelings of shame and humiliation, feelings of helplessness, and increased stress and anxiety, indicating the damaging psychological effects repetitive hurtful behavior can have on children (Slee, 1999; Craig, 1998; Newman et al., 2005).

Continued victimization leads to social anxiety and adjustment problems. Children may have difficulty forming friendships and maintaining ongoing relationships, which may lead to poor social and emotional adjustment, few peer relationships, and increased feelings of loneliness. Victims often see themselves as failures, and deserving of the ongoing abuse and humiliation (Craig, 1998; Biggs et al., 2009; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Some research has indicated that there is an increased risk of substance abuse among individuals who are continually victimized due to isolation, the desire to escape, and in some cases, the desire to fit in and gain acceptance in a peer group. Victims may be more likely to engage in risk behavior due to the feeling that they have nothing to lose (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Harlow et al., 2010).

Research by LeVasseur, Kelvin, and Grosskopf (2013) discussed the increased rate of suicide attempts among high school students who experienced bullying over the course of the year prior to the attempt. It was noted that youth who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual experienced increased bullying, which also led to increased suicide attempts among this population (LeVasseur et al., 2013). Suicidal ideation may be experienced by victims of bullying as a way to escape and get back at perpetrators (Rigby, 2012; Ramirez, 2013).

Research by Harlow and Roberts (2010) found that victims would often exhibit disruptive behavior symptomology including lack of impulse control and poor work ethic. Due to feelings of helplessness and isolation, victims may begin to bully others in an attempt to gain power and control over someone perceived as weaker than they. This often leads to the formation of the victim/bully, who alternates between being a victim and victimizing others (Slee, 1994; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). This conduct may be an indication of what the child is experiencing inside, and indicative of feelings of disorganization, confusion surrounding self-image and identity, and anger and hostility towards the perpetrator (Haeseler, 2010).

Chronic victimization may lead to a high risk for developing long-lasting and serious health-problems, both physical and psychological in nature. Newman et al. (2005) found that females who reported frequent victimization experienced increased stress symptoms including: depression, anxiety, dissociation, sexual problems and sleep disturbance. Due to the stressful nature of victimization, effects have been found to last years after the incidents occur (Newman et al., 2005; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Rigby, 2000). Cooper and Nickerson (2013) asked parents to recall instances of bullying from their youth, and found that those who experienced bullying as a child remembered these occurrences 30 to 40 years later, reporting that they have not forgotten what was done to them and what they did to others.

Students who are targeted by bullies on an ongoing basis often have a negative perception of the school environment, and feel as though they are not safe. Bullying negatively affects an individual's ability to achieve academic success, and victims have reported unhappiness and dissatisfaction with school. Bullying has been shown to lead to

high absenteeism and low grades among those who are perpetrated on an ongoing basis

(Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Slee, 1994; Ramirez, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005)

Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) found that students who perceived the school

environment as unsafe were more likely to practice avoidance behaviors such as cutting

class or skipping school, act aggressively, or carry weapons to school. Aggressive

behaviors towards bullies often resulted in disciplinary consequences, even if used in

self-defense, and victims are often left with feelings of vengeance (Ramirez, 2013).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 14 and 34

school- aged children are victims of homicide on school grounds and on their way to and

from school each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Research has

indicated that there is a connection between bullying and acts of large scale violence,

such as school shootings, which have made headlines and left devastating effects over the

years in cases such as Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Through school shootings, individuals resort to extreme acts of retribution in an attempt

to get back at perpetrators, peers, and the school as a whole for failing to recognize their

perceived sufferings (Mongan et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005;

Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Bearing Witness to Bullying in Schools

Research has indicated that bullying most frequently occurs on school grounds or

on the way to and from school. In a survey completed in Australia among secondary

school students, approximately half of the students were bullied over the course of the

school year on at least one occasion (Rigby, 2000). Research by Slee (1994) found that

26 % of students who participated in the questionnaire were bullied once a week or more

often, with approximately 16 % of students reporting episodes of bullying lasting 6

months or more at school. Bullying affects the entire school and creates an environment

of fear and intimidation among students (Witted & Dupper, 2005). While the bully and

the victim are directly involved in the occurrence, peers are often present when others are

being bullied, and witness acts of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse towards other

students. These individuals who witness incidents at school but may not be directly

involved are often referred to as bystanders (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper,

2005).

Outside of the bully and the victim, bystanders are everyone else present during

an incident of bullying that bear witness to the situation. The National Crime Prevention

Council has reported that 52 % of children witness bullying at school at least once a week

(National Crime Prevention Council, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education (2013)

classifies bystanders into four categories: those who assist the bully by encouraging the

behavior and occasionally joining in, those who support the bully by laughing or

encouraging the continuation of the behavior, those who watch the act, but neither

reinforce the bullying behavior or defend the victim, and those who defend the victim by

attempting to comfort or stop the bullying behavior. The U.S. Department of Education

discussed that bystanders may experience the following: fear of associating with the

victim, fear of reporting bullying incidents, guilt and helplessness, bullying behavior, and

feelings of being unsafe (Kansas Safe Schools Resource Center, 2013). Individuals who

witness peers being mistreated may view this as an unpleasant experience, and become

distressed if the bullying continues. Bystanders often fear that they may be the next

target, and begin to view school as an unsafe place (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

In a study that examined parents' accounts of bullying as children, 34.5 % of participants reported that they did not participate in bullying, but actively remembered witnessing instances of bullying throughout school (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). Children and adolescents are often trying to gain popularity and status at school, and may bully those perceived as weak in order to better their own social position. Bullies often attempt to gather support from peers in order to justify and promote the continued victimization of students viewed as lower on the social hierarchy of the school. Bystanders may choose not to stand up for the victim due to the fear that they will become targets or their own social position will decrease (Estell et al., 2008). Slaby, Wilson-Brewer, and Dash (2011) reported "bystanders are the most pivotal group of bullying influencers since youth are so heavily influenced by their peers," (as cited in Padgett and Notar, 2013).

Research by Ramirez (2013) found that bystanders often provoked bullies, and encouraged the continuation of physical and verbal abuse towards other students. This most frequently occurred during recess or in the hallways when there was limited adult supervision. One student discussed that when he would see or hear bystanders instigating bullies, he would leave the area due to the fear of being attacked (Ramirez, 2013). As bullies often target victims who are socially isolated, it is likely easier for bystanders to side with the bully as opposed to standing up for the victim due to not having an invested interest in the victim's well being, and the importance of their own inclusion among peers (Mishna, 2004; Estell et al, 2008).

Bystanders often begin to believe the things that the bully is saying about the victim, and may become bullies themselves by joining in or initiating ongoing abuse.

Victims who are repetitively targeted at school are more likely to become the target of

bystanders as well as the bully. A statement that summarizes how widespread bullying

can be within a school came from a student at Columbine who made the following

comment in regard to the school shooters:

> Sure we teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with
>
> weird hairdos and horns on their hats? It's not just jocks; the whole school's
>
> disgusted with them. They're a bunch of homos…. If you want to get rid of
>
> someone, usually you tease 'em. So the whole school would call them homos.
>
> (Gibbs & Roche, 1999, p. 48 as cited in Mongan et al., 2009, p. 638).

When bystanders get involved in bullying, the effects on the victim can be

devastating. Mongan et al. (2009) discussed the stages of change model, which describes

six stages a student may move through prior to committing a large-scale act of school

violence.   The authors attempted to analyze the etiology of school shootings through the

stages-of-change model in order to attempt to explain how an eventual school shooter can

go from harmless to lethal, how to recognize the student's progression through the stages,

and how to utilize prevention and intervention efforts based on what stage the student

may be in. This model is aimed at providing an understanding of what leads an individual

to become violent, and discusses the importance of students realizing how their actions,

and the actions of their peers, may impact other students, particularly in the case of

bullying. The model speaks to the importance of increasing awareness of what is going

on at school, and empowers students to tell someone if they are witnessing bullying, or

other forms of marginalization, so that the behavior can be addressed in order to prevent

further escalation.

Bystanders comprise the majority of the school as this group has the potential to include everyone that is not being bullied or victimized at the time of each incident. Bully prevention programs, such as "Aggressors, Victim and Bystanders" and "School Wide Positive Behavior Supports," discuss that bullies would not continue to victimize students if these actions were not condoned and/or allowed to continue to happen by peers due to them not stepping in. Curriculum focuses on training students to stand up to bullies and intervene in bullying situations. Bystanders are educated on the importance of intervening as opposed to standing by and watching bullying happen as this allows it to continue to occur (Padgett & Notar, 2013).

Prevention of Bullying in Schools/ Fostering Positive Interactions

Due to the prevalence of bullying in schools, many schools have adopted anti-bullying initiatives and bully prevention programs in an effort to support positive peer relationships and alleviate negative interactions among students (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Prevention and intervention efforts often vary based on the preference of school administration, the perceived effects bullying has on students, and the availability of resources and support staff to implement bully-prevention efforts.

Research has discussed the importance of social support from teachers, parents, and peers to counteract the negative effects of bullying. Having a social support network allows students to share their experience with individuals they trust (Newman et al., 2005; Rigby, 2000; Ramirez, 2013). Rigby (2000) found that adolescents who saw themselves as having increased social support were less likely to be victimized in school and report higher levels of overall well being. Students who were being bullied at school

reported coping mechanisms that included staying with friends during unsupervised portions of the day and using relationships to cope with the effects of bullying (Ramirez, 2013).

The importance of designing curriculum content that focuses on literacy, diversity, cooperative, and helpful behavior was recognized as a way to increase the development of positive peer relationships, leading to increased social support among peers, and deterring bullying behavior (Haeseler, 2010; Rigby, 2000). Schools can also assist in the creation of social support networks through after-school programs and peer-mentoring groups (Newman et al., 2005). The Bullying Project is an anti-bullying program designed around the importance of social support. The program is aimed at helping students learn how to stand up to bullies, get help from an adult, and befriend peers who are being bullied. Interventions are designed to help both the bully and the victim through counseling and support groups (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

It is important to develop school-wide initiatives that target bullying (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Biggs et al., 2009). Literature suggests that social workers should facilitate intervention efforts that include students, parents, school staff, and community members in order to ensure that unified goals surrounding bully prevention efforts are in place (Biggs et al., 2009). Youth rely on adults to help, and when they are aware that all adults are in support of bully prevention, this provides them with the opportunity to seek assistance from a wide support network as needed (Mishna, 2004).

Parental involvement is crucial when children are being bullied at school. The involvement of parents and other caregivers supports open-communication between

home and school, ongoing collaboration as to what is working/not working, and allows

parents to support ongoing intervention efforts outside of school (Biggs et al., 2009;

Mishna, 2004; Burkhart, Knox, & Brockmyer, 2012). The implementation of a school

and community collaborative encourages students and staff to take active leadership roles

to stop bullying, and supports continuous monitoring and improvement based on

feedback from participants (Haesler, 2010).   Various programs have been designed

regarding the need for multi-level intervention efforts, with The Olweus Bullying

Prevention Program [OBPP] being one of the most widely used in schools throughout the

world.

The OBPP is a model that focuses on the inclusion of all school staff in anti-

bullying efforts, and uses multi-level interventions to promote respect, a positive learning

environment, and the use of social supports to counter-act the effects of bullying. The

program is implemented by teachers, administration, students, and parents, and

encourages students to stand up to bullies. It has been found that when the program is

fully implemented, it has reduced the occurrence of bullying and improved the overall

environment of the school (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski

& Kopasz, 2005). Padgett and Notar (2013) discussed that when OBPP was implemented

in Norway, a study was completed among 2500 elementary and junior high students that

indicated a 50% reduction in instances of bullying.

Bully prevention efforts focused on developing a safe social and physical

environment for students have been found to increase students' positive perceptions of

being at school and create an atmosphere of respect and safety (LeVasseur et al., 2013).

Whitted and Dupper (2005) discussed the importance of working to change the culture

and climate of the school in order to effectively target bullying. Newman et al. (2005)

also spoke to the importance of changing the environment at school with efforts focused

on attempting to reduce isolation among students. In a qualitative study of five junior

high students, several of the students reported analyzing the environment in an effort to

determine whether it was safe, or the student needed to leave to prevent being attacked.

This was identified as a coping strategy that helped students gain a sense of control, and

allowed them to leave environments that they deemed unsafe to avoid being bullied

(Ramirez, 2013).

Bully Proofing Your School is a prevention and intervention program that focuses

on changing the overall climate of the school by taking power away from bullies and

giving this to the majority of caring students (Padgett & Notar, 2013). This model works

to prevent students from obtaining too much power, thus making it easier for them to

bully others without fear of rejection or retribution from other students. By working to

educate students on the need to intervene in bullying situations, stand-up for oneself and

others, and report instances of bullying to adults, it is hoped that the power differential

will shift, and students will stand up for one another as opposed to bullying each other.

Several schools have implemented zero tolerance policies in an effort to alleviate

all forms of school violence, including bullying. Zero-tolerance is implemented on a

school-wide level, and sends the message that no form of violence or bullying will be

tolerated, along with zero tolerance for drugs or weapons found on school grounds. This

policy uses suspension, alternative school placements, expulsion, and meetings with law

enforcement as consequences for these behaviors (National Association of School

Psychologists, 2013). Research varies on the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies.

Biggs et al. (2009) discussed the benefits of zero tolerance in creating a safe environment

for all students by addressing all forms of bullying at school. Other research has

discussed the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies due to the punitive discipline

strategies used and the tendency to create distrust among students and teachers (Padgett

& Notar, 2013). Brownstein (2009) discussed that zero tolerance policies are ineffective

due to students who are being bullied often receiving the same punishment as those who

are bullying them, resulting in everyone involved in a fight or altercation being

suspended without examining the cause of the incident.

Research shows that schools have various prevention and intervention efforts and

programs in place to address bullying. Efforts include: increased social support, standing

up to bullies, changing the school environment, multi-level intervention efforts, social-

skills training, use of coping skills, curriculum development focused on diversity,

enhanced training, and parental involvement (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005;

Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Ramirez, 2013; LeVasseur et al., 2013; Newman et al.,

2005). Programs in place at a national level designed to stop bullying include: the OBPP,

Bully-Busters, The Bullying Project, School Wide Positive Behavior Supports, Bully

Proofing your school, and Zero Tolerance (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper,

2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). In instances where these programs have been

evaluated, it has been reported that there was a substantial decrease in the occurrence of

bullying. Results, however, have been inconsistent, and many of the programs have not

been formally evaluated (Brownstein, 2009; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Further research is necessary to examine how schools are working to prevent

bullying through program implementation and best practice due to the frequent

occurrence of bullying, the lasting effects of continued victimization, and the importance

of involving bystanders in prevention and intervention efforts. As schools are using such

a wide-variety of anti-bullying interventions, it is necessary to determine what is working

best in order to develop a consistent approach to targeting bullying based on best

practice. This qualitative research interviewed a small sample of school social workers

throughout the state of Minnesota in order to determine whether they are using an anti-

bullying curriculum (i.e. explicitly and/or implicitly), what is working in their school to

address bullying, interventions that have proven ineffective in their settings, and how

bystanders are incorporated into anti-bullying efforts.

Conceptual Framework

This study will utilize a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework to assist

in the interpretation and understanding of the data gathered. The Collaborative for

Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Social and Emotional

Learning Research Group at the University of Illinois in Chicago discussed how the

utilization of an SEL framework in schools can be expanded to include bullying

prevention (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien, 2009).

SEL is aimed at helping children develop social and emotional skills that they are

able to utilize across a variety of settings and situations that arise across their lifespan.

CASEL defines SEL as "the processes through which children and adults acquire the

knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions,

demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make

responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively, (Ragozzino &

Utne- O'Brien, 2009, p. 3). CASEL concludes that children should possess social and

emotional skills including: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. These skills help children to resolve disagreements among peers, recognize their own emotional response to various situations, initiate and maintain friendships, and make good choices. SEL programs and curricula teach social and emotional skills to children based on their developmental level, and provide opportunities for them to practice these skills throughout the day. Skill development and utilization begins in elementary school and continues through high school graduation, and is reinforced in the classroom, hallways, lunchroom, after-school activities, and at home (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien, 2009).

Research has discussed the need to develop and implement anti-bullying initiatives that are comprehensive and reinforced by the school, at home, and in the community (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Biggs et al., 2009**).** In order to effectively prevent and respond to bullying, the school culture and climate should be based on respect. Expectations on how to treat one another should be clear to all students and staff, and appropriate behavior should be modeled and reinforced throughout the school.   The five core skills that children are taught to develop through the implementation of SEL programs and curricula, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making, are the same skills that students need to deal with bullying (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien, 2009).

Self-awareness and self-management skills will assist children to recognize and regulate their emotions, allowing them to respond to conflict calmly and rationally. Research has discussed that children who are angry and aggressive often bully others, while children who are emotional tend to be victimized. By learning to recognize how

one is feeling, this will allow time to process that emotion, and formulate an appropriate response (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien, 2009). Social awareness helps children understand differences among peers, and demonstrate empathy toward one another. If bystanders feel empathy towards the victim and concern for others, they are more likely to intervene (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien). Relationship skills help children cultivate friendships, resist pressure to participate in bullying, and seek assistance from adults as needed. Friendships often help decrease victimization, and when students refuse to join in and support bullying, the bully does not receive recognition for his/her actions, and the behavior usually stops (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien). Responsible decision-making allows children to think things through and respond appropriately to problems. Children equipped with problem-solving skills are more apt to think about the consequences associated with their actions, which may prevent them from bullying others or deescalate a situation in which they are being bullied (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien).

In order to prevent bullying in schools, students need the opportunity to develop these core skills, and apply them to a variety of bullying scenarios. SEL framework provides a supportive foundation for bullying prevention efforts, and can be applied through a variety of strategies within the school. Schools can apply an SEL framework to bullying prevention through a variety of school-wide approaches.

CASEL recommends that schools complete an assessment to determine the prevalence of bullying within the school, and how students and teachers are responding to incidents when they occur. From this perspective, all individuals working with students should be made aware of bullying, and receive training on how to effectively intervene in bullying situations. Schools should develop a universal definition of what bullying is that

is clear to all staff and students, put rules in place regarding behavior that will not be tolerated, and allow people to anonymously report incidents of bullying. Schools should create a discipline policy that clearly states that bullying will not be tolerated, and consistently respond to any incidents of bullying. Consequences should not be punitive in nature, but should focus on understanding the incident and practicing positive social interactions (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien).

CASEL recommends that schools ensure there is adequate adult supervision throughout the school, and that adults are constantly modeling positive behavior towards others, and the need to intervene immediately in instances of bullying, thus encouraging bystanders to do the same. Schools should allow students the opportunity to interact with other students through positive and cooperative forums in order to apply the core SEL skills they have developed (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien).

It is important that SEL skill development is also incorporated in classroom learning. CASEL recommends that teacher's work to create a classroom climate centered on respect for one another, inclusion, and cooperative and caring interactions. SEL curricula and activities can be utilized in order to help children think about the negative effects of bullying, and practice SEL skills by role-playing how to react in bullying situations. It is recommended that interventions be utilized throughout the classroom and the school as whole such as pairing at-risk children with a buddy, and having a support system in place for victims. It is important to involve parents in what is happening at school, and how to promote social and emotional skill development at home (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien).

A Social and Emotional Learning Framework holds potential to help with understanding the data based on the social and emotional skills children are utilizing to handle various situations at home, school, and in the community. A SEL framework holds promise to aide in recognizing which skills students are utilizing in regard to bullying prevention, intervention, responses to bullying situations at school, and fostering positive interactions among peers.

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine emerging best practices currently being utilized by social workers in seven Minnesota schools to effectively prevent and respond to bullying among school-aged youth. The literature discussed various bullying intervention curricula and programs used by schools across the globe, and further research is necessary in order to determine which parts of prevention efforts being used are perceived as the most effective by those working in school settings. This study utilized a qualitative research design to better understand approaches schools are using, both formal and informal, for eliminating bullying within the school.

Population and Sample

The study sample was comprised of seven school social workers currently practicing social work in a school in Minnesota. Six of the school social workers were employed in elementary schools, and one school social worker was employed in a high school. All social workers interviewed were women and had been practicing school social work between 7 and 34 years, with the mean number of years of practice as a school social worker being 16.29. Inclusion criteria for participation included current

employment as a school social worker and having familiarity and experience with

bullying prevention and intervention efforts being utilized at the participant's school/s.

Ideally, participants would be utilizing an explicit anti-bullying curriculum, but the lack

of formal curriculum did not lead to exclusion from the study. If a participant came from

a school without a formal program, they were asked about informal prevention and

intervention efforts for dealing with bullying among students.

Participants were selected through a combination of purposive sampling and

snowball sampling. Padgett (2008) defines purposive sampling as, "a deliberate process

of selecting respondents based on their ability to provide the needed information," (p.

53). All participants were selected on the basis of being a school social worker, and

having the ability to provide information regarding bullying prevention in the schools. In

order to narrow down the potential pool of school social workers and obtain a study

sample. Potential interviewees were requested from the researcher's committee members,

individuals employed in the schools, and other professional acquaintances. The

researcher continued to request potential participants from those who agreed to

participate in the study until seven interviews were obtained. Six of the interviews were

completed at the participant's school and one interview was completed by phone due to

distance.

Protection of Human Participants

In order to ensure protection of human participants, an informed consent form

was developed and reviewed with each participant prior to beginning the interview that

further explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and the

measures that would be utilized to ensure confidentiality (please refer to Appendix A).

The informed consent was developed from a template approved by the University of St.

Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) for expedited-level review and approved by

the research committee, comprised of Steven Oie, Nicole Johnston, and David

Roseborough, and Institutional Review Board prior to administering to participants.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions after the form was reviewed, and

agreed to the information laid out in the informed consent. All participants were given a

copy of the informed consent for their records.

Data Collection

A qualitative research design was used to obtain data from participants through

interviews. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, guided by a set of

questions that were pre-approved by the research committee and Institutional Review

Board (see Appendix B for interview guide). Questions were designed to build on the

current research surrounding bullying prevention, and provide further knowledge

surrounding the best way to prevent bullying in schools. The questions attempted to elicit

open and honest feedback from the interviewees, and avoid interviewer bias, through the

use of more objective wording and open-ended questions.

The questions were designed to look at the perceived prevalence of bullying in the

schools, the perceived effects on the victims, and bullying prevention and intervention

efforts that are most effective from the participant's professional perspectives. The

questions began by asking demographic information about the interviewee and their

experience with bully prevention. Next, questions were asked pertaining to the

prevalence of bullying in the participant's schools, forms of bullying most frequently

seen, and characteristics of those who bully. Following this, questions were asked

regarding the perceived effects of bullying on victims, and whether they believe this correlates to increased school violence. Next, questions focused on the impact of bullying on bystanders and how those who bear witness to bullying can be incorporated in ant-bullying efforts. Finally, questions were asked regarding anti-bullying curriculum, programs, and strategies being implored in schools, the effectiveness of these efforts, the factors that have been found most important to utilize in anti-bullying efforts, and what can be done to foster positive interactions among youth.

Data Analysis

This study used data reduction in order to interpret the data obtained during the interviews. Data reduction analysis takes the data set, and uses inductive reasoning to draw similar concepts from the available information provided by the respondents. The concepts extracted from the interviews are then grouped into codes (Padgett, 2008). Following this analytic framework, the interviews were transcribed and reviewed, and concepts were extracted from the transcriptions. Open coding was used to draw out the similar concepts in the data set, and label what appeared to be initial concepts in the margin next to the text throughout the transcription. Recurring codes were grouped into themes, which were then reviewed again to ensure that all relevant concepts were addressed by the established themes.

In order to check the reliability of the established codes, the researcher completed a secondary review of the transcriptions to determine if any prevalent concepts were missed during the initial coding. Padgett (2008) discusses the importance of ongoing comparative analysis in order to ensure reliability. Once the initial and secondary codes

were developed, the researcher compared the codes with one another, and themes were redefined based on the codes found prevalent in both the initial and secondary coding.

Results

The current research study attempted to determine what schools are doing to counteract bullying among students, what prevention and intervention efforts being utilized in schools are perceived to be most effective among school social workers, and how schools can best promote positive interactions among peers.

Seven school social workers employed within various districts throughout the state of Minnesota were interviewed. The respondents had all been practicing school social work between seven and 34 years, with the mean number of years of practice as a school social worker being 16.14. All respondents interviewed were women, and six of the respondents were employed in an elementary setting, while one respondent was employed in a high school setting.

All respondents spoke to some degree regarding the need to define what bullying is, and the difference between bullying and normal conflict among students. Some participants discussed that children will report they are being bullied, or parents will call in and report that their child is being bullied, but it often turns out to be a disagreement among several peers, or friendship issues, or classroom issues, and not specifically bullying. "We are finding in some of the cases a little of it is normal friendship issues, or normal developmental issues where someone is maybe just not nice… or has said a rude comment, stuff you have to teach."

One respondent discussed that normal conflict among peers can quickly escalate into a bullying situation, and should be continuously addressed, no matter how small it

may seem, "I think that really felt like a bullying instance, that stuff happens all the time, everyday."

Throughout the interviews, four common themes emerged, which were identified as: the importance of social skill development among students, the use of formal and information curriculum and programming, community building and active supervision, and the bystander effect.

Development and Utilization of Social Skills

Throughout the interviews, respondents identified traits that may be common of children who tend to bully others including: low self-esteem, history of being bullied, feelings of anger and frustration regarding things going on outside of the school setting, insecurity, and lack of support network. Some respondents discussed that there are no identifying traits common to bullies, and that many of the children who are acting as the bully have high self-esteem, are narcissistic, are socially savvy, and have a large social circle. One respondent described some of the children she works with, "my mean girls group…it is like PTSD of junior high, like oh my God you would eat your young they are so mean, and nobody would believe it because they come from the nicest families and present as the nicest girls."

Respondents discussed that many children seem to be seeking power and control, and use bullying others as a way to increase their own social status. Overall, respondents reported that bullying seems to stem from a lack of knowledge surrounding how to create connections and form friendships through positive interactions with peers. A common theme expressed throughout the interviews was the need to educate and work with

children on how to effectively develop and utilize appropriate social skills with peers and adults.

All respondents discussed the importance of teaching children how to appropriately communicate and interact with peers in order to build meaningful relationships based on respect, as opposed to relationships comprised of fear, power, and control.   Some social workers discussed that schools should be teaching life skills to children in addition to academics in order to provide children with the ability to handle change, disagreement, and conflict appropriately.

> *I wish there was more time in the day, or a little bit more focus on life skills or social skills curriculum, or just awareness of differences, similarities… the diversity in our world.*

Several respondents specifically spoke to the need to incorporate a social emotional learning framework into schools in order to help children develop an understanding of key social skills including: empathy, impulse control, emotional management, anger management, self-control, and problem solving. By utilizing this framework, children are provided with a set of skills that they can draw upon to resolve issues with peers at school, home, and in the community. Respondents discussed the need to reinforce these skills throughout the year, and constantly identify what they are and how to use them.

> *We have to teach the skills and their recognition and understanding so we don't have the problem, and then if we do have a problem, we can go back to what we taught them and help them use those skills to solve the problem.*

Several respondents specifically mentioned empathy in regard to helping children understand what it feels like to be picked on, made fun of, and treated unkindly.

Respondents discussed that many children do not realize how their actions and words are affecting other children. One respondent reported that often times when you point out to a child that they are hurting another child through their actions or words, they are able to empathize with the individual regarding how that might feel, and will change their behavior.

> *When kids are in fourth grade we have the kindness retreat where they focus on empathy, understanding how others feel, and kids will actually apologize to other kids for things they have done. You want the empathy… especially in the younger grades; it really helps them realize what it feels like to be left out, not to be included.*

Adult modeling was also discussed as an important way for children to learn how to interact with others, especially in stressful situations. Adults are able to demonstrate how to manage their emotions by explaining how they are feeling, and what they are doing to help calm down and process what happened.

> *We have to model for kids how you solve disagreements with people, and your own emotional control. So as adults we have to model problem solving and conflict resolution and respect… it is very important for teachers to model what they want kids to do, and to show kids they are modeling it.*

Respondents discussed the importance of teaching children how to advocate for themselves and others and be assertive. If adults work with children on how to stand up to bullies by using respectful language, they are arming students with the ability to peacefully resolve conflict while gaining self-empowerment and self-confidence, and avoiding exclusion.

I hear myself saying, well, if it is hard to play with that one kid just go play

somewhere else, but am I teaching her exclusion early on? What if I taught my

daughter to look at the person and say, you know what, I don't like how you are

playing, but I really like you and if you want to play with me we are going to play

this, we would love to have you, but if you are playing that way I don't want to

play with you. So it is assertive, but giving that other kid an opportunity to

change that behavior, and it is also giving my kid an out.

Social skill development was discussed by some of the respondents in terms of

curriculum, the second theme identified throughout the interviews as important in regard

to bullying prevention.

Formal and Informal Curriculum and Programming

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed curriculum they use within their

schools to help prevent and intervene when bullying occurs among students. Many of the

participants discussed that their schools do not have a specific anti-bullying curriculum,

but utilize a school wide curriculum that focuses on providing students with common

language and expectations so that they have a clear understanding of appropriate

interactions with peers, and how to problem-solve if things are not going well.

Five of the respondents mentioned Second Step Curriculum, based on a social and

emotional learning framework, as a beneficial tool for teaching children how to manage

their own feelings and emotions, and be proactive instead of reactive. One respondent

discussed that the Second Step curriculum is currently mandatory in Kindergarten

throughout the school district, and will be phased into the first and second grade health

curriculums over the next two years, with third through fifth grade being optional. By

teaching social and emotional skills to children right when they enter school, including

learning how to listen, practice empathy, emotional management, and problem solving, it

helps children recognize positive ways to interact with other students.

> *I mean it is teaching skills that would be helpful in bullying prevention. I don't*
> *think this would be considered a bullying prevention curriculum, but it would help*
> *with that.*

The majority of participants identified utilizing various curriculums in some way

in regard to bullying prevention and intervention. Several respondents discussed the

Steps to Respect Curriculum, which is a specific bullying prevention program, as a good

tool for addressing bullying on a school-wide level as it involves administrators, adults,

and students, and teaches children how to make friends and respond to bullying. One

respondent mentioned utilizing the Character Count Traits along with the Zones of

Regulation, focusing on positive character traits, self-regulation, and noticing and

building empathy. Other programs being utilized in schools that respondents identified

as being beneficial included: Above the Line/Below the Line, Bucket Filling,

Mindfulness Curriculum, and Respect Retreats.

Respondents discussed holding district-wide and school-wide days/events focused

on bullying prevention. One school social worker discussed that she focuses a lot of her

efforts on educating and involving students in anti-bullying efforts during bullying

prevention month, including having all classrooms do something to show they can stand

up to bullying, hanging signs in the hallways, and making kids aware of what bullying is

and what to do if they are feeling bullied. Other respondents also discussed the

importance of having signs in the hallway that reiterate appropriate ways to behave at

school, and working with children to increase their awareness and understanding of

bullying.

I like that it is the beginning of the school year [bullying prevention month] *where*

we really try to kick things off to make kids more aware of what bullying is and what they

should do if they are feeling bullied.

Three respondents reported that they do not utilize a specific curriculum, but instead

apply individualized programming, modified curriculum, or an infused practice approach

when working with students. Respondents identified a clinical social work approach as

an effective way to work with children who are being bullied. Other effective strategies

identified included small groups focused on skill-building, promoting positive

interactions, and behavior management, working through incidents as a group and

making a commitment to stop talking about it once it has been resolved, and working

with children, groups, and classrooms to teach strategies focusing on what to do when a

child is in a bullying situation. Several respondents discussed the importance of role-

playing in order to allow kids the opportunity to practice what they would do in a

bullying situation.

> *You have to find a stick…if x happens, this is what I am going to say… I will get*
>
> *in their face, and I will be like this mean person, and they won't talk to me and I*
>
> *tell them you have to stare me in the nose, because eyes are too scary, stare me in*
>
> *the mouth and tell me in your biggest baddest voice…leave me alone, and turn*
>
> *and walk away, you give them something and you leave. But we role-play, role-*
>
> *play, role-play because I need these kids to be able to find their mojo.*

Formal and informal curriculum and programming was identified as an important part of bullying prevention and intervention. Respondents also discussed the importance of community building and active supervision as ways to foster a sense of community among students and deter the likelihood of bullying, which was identified as a third theme.

Community Building and Active Supervision

Community building was identified by all respondents to some extent as an integral part of creating a positive school climate and fostering positive interactions among students. Several respondents discussed the need to have consistent behavior expectations for all students throughout the school that are continuously reinforced. Respondents discussed the importance of utilizing school-wide efforts that focus on positive behaviors, traits, and interactions among students. Many participants reported that their school utilized some type of positive reinforcement system that allowed school staff to reward children for modeling appropriate behaviors. Another participant discussed that the participant's school has monthly school-wide assemblies where the entire school comes together to do community-building activities including class and student of the month.

> *Adults in our school working really hard at establishing relationships with kids is the best intervention, and really working super hard to create a school climate that we don't want to be like that here, that is not who we are.*

Several respondents discussed the importance of teaching inclusion throughout the school, and increasing awareness and acceptance of differences and diversity among students. Participants discussed the importance of talking to children and educating them

about disabilities, poverty, homelessness, GLBT, race, adoption, and other individual and social differences among people. One participant discussed the emphasis she places on commonalities and helping students find mutual interests so that they are more accepting of one another, and able to identify positive attributes in others as opposed to negative ones.

> *A lot of times people feel more comfortable bullying somebody when they don't feel they have anything in common with anybody... so we do some work around that in the classroom, finding those different types of similarities with people other than what you see, maybe there are things about people you don't even know.*

Developing a home and school connection was identified as an important part of contributing to a positive school community, and providing children with additional support at school. Several respondents discussed attempts to keep parents informed of various programs and curriculum being implemented at school so that parents could reinforce this at home as well. Four respondents discussed having programs in place to get parents, specifically dads, more involved with coming into the school and spending time with students, acting as a positive male role model. All respondents discussed that parental support was a beneficial component of bullying prevention in schools.

> *We have our trait each month and all the parents know what the trait is, and we promote our overall theme for the year, and I think that is really helpful for parents because they know what we are talking about...so we just really try to include families because they are the most important piece of the child's life.*

On the opposing end, two respondents discussed that parents often contribute to bullying behavior based on conflict in the community being brought into the school, parents encouraging anti-social behavior, and parents failing to recognize how their own behavior is influencing how their children respond to others.

> *Sometimes it feels very much like a way of life for some areas of the city. It is just the way communities function, it is kind of part of life because a lot of times the parents that come in are driving their kid to the fight.*

Six respondents reported that the school they are currently working in is a PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] school, where focus is placed on creating a safe, respectful and responsible school. Respondents discussed that PBIS places an emphasis on active supervision, and having adults build positive relationships with students throughout the building by being present in the hallways before and after school, and rewarding positive behavior. Respondents discussed that having staff presence in the hallways, bathroom, lunchroom, and other unsupervised areas keeps students from having an opportunity to seek out other kids in negative ways.

> *It provides positive interaction for students with teachers that they maybe wouldn't have gotten otherwise…Even to help them feel special, sometimes a bullying student, their behaviors are because of… being picked on or not feeling, having the greatest self-esteem, and so if a teacher is able to reach out to them, to be a trusted adult to them.*

Providing active supervision and working to create a positive school climate were both identified as important school-wide efforts in regard to bullying prevention.   The fourth theme present throughout the interviews was the importance of the bystander in bullying

situations, and the bystander's ability to both hinder and help the bully based on their reaction to the event.

The Bystander Effect

Participants discussed the importance of the bystander in regard to bullying prevention and intervention, but differed on the level of involvement and emphasis that should be placed on a bystander.

The majority of participants discussed the importance of educating students surrounding what to do if another student is being bullied, and how to be a healthy bystander. Several participants talked about various ways children should be taught to intervene in bullying situations based on what they are comfortable doing. A few identified intervention strategies included asking the child being targeted to come and play in order to get them out of the situation, telling the bully to stop what he is doing, or requesting assistance from an adult. Seeking adult assistance was identified as the main way elementary children tend to intervene when they witness bullying by the majority of respondents. One respondent reported that she role-plays how to help a friend if they are being bullied in order to give kids the tools to intervene in a real-life situation.

> *You should put all your interventions to them, how to do it, how to help a friend if*
>
> *they're caught, how do you swoop in and do it in a quiet way, how do you do it in*
>
> *a loud way, how do you vocalize, how do you find your words, how do you make*
>
> *the world safer for you and everyone else.*

Several respondents discussed the importance they place on standing up to bullies in order to let the bully know that what they are doing will not be tolerated. It is important to provide clear expectations surrounding what students are expected to do if they witness

another student being treated unkindly. One respondent discussed that she utilizes the

Olewus Bullying Circle with students to help them identify the various roles a student can

play in a bullying situation including: the bully, the henchmen, the observers, engaged

observers, passive observers, and hero. The respondent discussed the importance of

working with children to move them toward the role of the hero, to shift them from

taking a passive role to an active role.

> *The goal is to shift as many kids as you can to be not passive and quietly*
>
> *supportive to asking questions and getting engaged to support kids.*

Respondents identified fear of retaliation as a reason kids may choose not to help another

student who is in a tough situation. Students often choose not to intervene because they

do not want to become a target or get involved. In cases where the bystander is choosing

not to intervene based on a desire to maintain their own self-preservation, participants

discussed the importance of educating students on different strategies they can use so

they do not look like they are the one telling the bully to knock it off. Adult involvement

was also mentioned as an important way a bystander can get help in a situation they are

not comfortable addressing on their own, but several respondents placed emphasis on the

bystander attempting to intervene prior to involving an adult if possible.

> *I think it is discouraging for kids, I think they lose their voice when they just*
>
> *become a bystander and then go to class, because how can it not impact you.*

Respondents held differing opinions on whether bystanders should be involved in

intervention efforts once bullying has been reported to an adult, and further intervention

is warranted. Several respondents discussed the importance of working through incidents

as a group in order to get all the information on the table, talk about what happened, and

come to an agreement on how to resolve the problem. One respondent reported that she

does not involve bystanders in intervention efforts due to a desire to contain the situation

and keep things confidential. On the opposite end, one respondent reported that she feels

that interventions should be geared towards bystanders, and they should receive the

harshest consequences if they do not intervene when another student is being mistreated.

> *If you see something go down and you do nothing, shame on you… you have the*
>
> *power to do something good and you did nothing and you watched it happen so*
>
> *you quietly give a message to the bully that it is acceptable and you have also told*
>
> *the person who is being hurt that you do not value them enough to stand up even*
>
> *if it is scary.*

Peers were deemed to be an instrumental tool in fostering positive interactions among

students through respect, kindness, and inclusion, without which could lead to more

serious acts of violence within the school setting. Most respondents discussed that school

violence may be linked to bullying based on information provided by the media

following large-scale tragedies such as Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Virginia Tech.

While most respondents reported that bullying had not escalated to more extreme acts of

violence within their schools, several respondents discussed that sometimes fights within

communities, those that are gang-related, and fights pertaining to children being from

Countries that are currently at war will get brought into the school. In this instance, the

participant working in the high school setting did report a direct connection between

bullying and school violence.

> *I think it creates a violent climate when you have kids who are doing the bullying;*
>
> *It creates a kind of emotionally unsafe place to come everyday and then in*

response, some kids certainly respond with aggression because they don't have

any other way, they don't feel they have any other options.

Participants discussed the need to continue to work on making school a safe environment for all children.

Participants discussed many strategies and ideas for incorporating bullying prevention and intervention efforts within the school. Participants discussed the need to work with and educate bystanders on what to do if another student is being mistreated. Participants discussed the need for schools to focus on community building, maintaining a positive home-school connection, and utilizing active supervision throughout the school. Participants identified the use of both formal and informal curriculum and programming as beneficial in helping to provide kids with the support and tools necessary to counteract bullying. Participants also spoke of the importance of teaching children social and emotional skills that can be utilized across settings and situations in order too effectively problem solve and self-regulate during stressful events.

Discussion

The current research attempted to gain further insight into bullying prevention and intervention efforts currently being utilized in a sample of Minnesota schools that school social workers perceive to be most effective in counteracting bullying and helping students form positive peer relationships. Previous research has discussed that bullying is widespread within schools, and negatively affects those who are being targeted, witnessing the negative interactions among students, and acting as the bully (Rigby, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Newman, Holden, & Delville, 2004; Ramirez, 2013).

Research discussed that schools utilize a variety of anti-bullying curricula, programs, and strategies to educate students on the negative effects associated with bullying, teach students positive ways to interact with each other and handle conflict, and prevent instances of bullying from occurring (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Biggs et al., 2009; Haeseler, 2010; Rigby, 2000). While there is extensive research available on how to deter the occurrence of bullying within the schools, the literature discussed that consensus varies on the effectiveness of programs, and what works best from the perspective of those employed within the schools (Brownstein, 2009; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). This study provides insight into what anti-bullying efforts are currently being utilized in a sample of Minnesotan schools, and which of these efforts are most effective from the perspective of this sample of school social workers.

Development and Utilization of Social Skills

Participants discussed that the most common forms of bullying they encounter among children are relational, physical, and cyber-bullying. All respondents reported that relational bullying occurs within their school of employment, most specifically exclusion, targeting a vulnerable child by telling others not to be their friend, and spreading rumors about a particular peer. Several respondents identified relational bullying to be the most detrimental to a student as it tends to be continuous, and impacts the student's ability to form a support network due to the misconception about whom the student is based on the rumors and gossip being circulated. Previous research has also identified relational bullying as being widely prevalent throughout schools, with it being particularly damaging to children due to the bully attempting to hurt the individual by destroying their ability to form relationships with other peers (Rigby, 2000; Padgett &

Notar, 2013; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008).

Respondents reported that relational bullying was prevalent among both boys and girls, but that girls tended to utilize this form more often in the school setting through the exclusion and isolation of peers. Participants discussed that boys often utilized physical forms of bullying including: pushing, tripping, attempting to intimidate others based on their size, and fighting. Previous research found similar differences in how girls bully compared to how boys bully, and attributed this to boys wanting to illicit a reaction from the victim, with girls wanting to cause harm through more indirect means (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Craig, 1998; Mishna, 2004).

Participants supported the idea that children tend to bully others due to lack of understanding regarding how their actions impact others, lack of empathy, and inability to self-regulate, among other factors. Participants identified the importance of teaching children effective social skills, including: problem solving, empathy, emotional management, impulse control, self-regulation, and how to interact with peers. All participants spoke to the importance of integrating social skill development into the school day. Several participants specifically mentioned utilizing a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework to help children develop key social and emotional skills. Previous research has also identified the benefits of using a SEL framework in regard to bullying prevention within the schools (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien, 2009). The literature suggests that equipping children with SEL skills helps them resolve disagreements among peers, identify how they are feeling and responding to things happening around them and regulate their response, form meaningful friendships, and

make practice making positive choices (Haeseler, 2010; Rigby, 2000; Ragozzino &
Utne- O'Brien, 2009).

Respondents identified a student's ability to practice empathy with peers as an
integral part of bullying prevention, which coincides with CASEL's findings surrounding
social awareness being important in helping children accept differences among one
another and demonstrate empathy towards each other (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien,
2009). Participants discussed that if a child is able to recognize how his or her actions
make another child feel, they will be more likely to interact with children in positive
ways.

The majority of participants supported the idea that adult modeling is an
important part of bullying prevention. Participants reported that having adults throughout
the school, including teachers, support staff, and administration, consistently model
respectful communication, how to handle conflict, how to deal with stressful situations,
and how to help others when something is not going well, provides students with a clear
understanding of expected behaviors and communication. Adult modeling is
incorporated into SEL frameworks in regards to having adults constantly model positive
behavior towards others, and immediately intervene in bullying situations, so that
children are aware of how to handle future situations (Ragozzino & Utne- O'Brien,
2009).

Formal and Informal Curriculum and Programming

Participants supported the idea that curriculum can be an effective way to educate
students on what bullying is, and how to prevent and respond to bullying instances within
the school. Respondents discussed that the majority of the curriculum utilized is not

specific to bullying prevention and intervention, but teaches many of the skills that have been found effective in reducing the occurrence of bullying among youth. Previous research also discussed the importance of designing curriculum content that is not necessarily specific to bullying, but instead focuses on increasing social support among peers, which in effect deters bullying behavior (Haeseler, 2010; Rigby, 2000).

Five participants reported that their school utilizes Second Step Curriculum that is based on social and emotional learning framework. Participants from two schools noted that since implementation of the Second Step curriculum, along with school-wide efforts to increase awareness among students of bullying, referrals to administration to deal with bullying situations have declined. Previous research also found that when programs, specifically the OBPP, are fully implemented throughout a school, the occurrence of bullying decreases (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Based on the current and previous research, it appears that when a curriculum, whether it is bullying specific or not, is implemented on a school-wide basis, bullying instances tend to decrease among students.

Respondents supported the idea that implementing school-wide initiatives to target bullying has been beneficial, which was a common theme found in previous literature (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Biggs et al., 2009). Respondents identified focusing on anti-bullying behaviors during bullying prevention month, holding school-wide and district-wide days focused on bullying prevention, and placing signs throughout the hallways that reinforce positive behaviors as successful ways to decrease the occurrence of bullying.

Several respondents discussed the importance of utilizing an integrative approach when working with students, and previous research has discussed the benefits of utilizing multi-level interventions to promote a positive, respectful learning environment (Padgett & Notar, 2013; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).   Respondents identified a clinical social work approach through individual, group, and classroom efforts as an effective way to resolve conflict among students. Respondents discussed the importance of individualized programming based on the needs of the students involved in bullying situations as the most effective way to counteract bullying, and reported modifying curriculum to ensure it is appropriate to the situation.

Community Building and Active Supervision

All participants discussed the importance of building a positive school climate and culture as an effective way to target bullying. Participants discussed holding school-wide assemblies, implementing community-building activities, and utilizing a positive reinforcement system throughout the school as ways to help children develop a sense of community and connect with peers. Previous literature also discussed the importance of building a climate conducive to increasing students' positive perceptions of school, creating a safe environment, and decreasing isolation (LeVasseur et al., 2013; Whitted and Dupper, 2005; Newman et al., 2005). Respondents discussed the need for schools to have a clear set of expectations, common language, and consistent interventions in place regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions among peers. Reinforcement of expected versus unexpected behaviors, and the opportunity to practice what to do in bullying situations through role-playing, were noted to be helpful for students.

Participants supported the idea that a home-school connection is beneficial in creating a positive school climate and decreasing the occurrence of bullying among students. Several respondents reported that when parents get involved in what is going on at school, children tend to feel a greater sense of safety, security, and support. Literature referred to the importance of collaboration between home and school in regards to open communication and reinforcing intervention efforts in place at school within the student's home (Biggs et al., 2009; Mishna, 2004; Burkhart, Knox, & Brockmyer, 2012).

On the opposing end, several respondents reported that parents could be a negative influence within the schools when they are engaged in conflict in the community, and encourage anti-social behavior at home and school. The respondents who reported that parental involvement could be detrimental still reported that a home-school connection is beneficial as long as healthy interactions and supports are in place. This finding would appear to support increased parental involvement in the school, but warns schools to monitor interactions that may be unhealthy.

Respondents identified active supervision as an important factor in regards to helping children feel supported at school, monitoring interactions among peers in non-structured settings, fostering positive relationships between teachers and students, and deterring the occurrence of bullying due to students understanding that adults are engaged with students. Previous research discussed that bullying usually occurs at times and locations where there tends to be minimal supervision (Ramirez, 2013; Biggs, Simpson, & Gaus, 2009). Six participants discussed the benefits of being a PBIS school due to this model mandating that all adults within the building and on the bus utilize active

supervision, build positive relationships with students, and praise students for doing the right thing.

The Bystander Effect

Five of the participants discussed that it is important to educate children on how to intervene in bullying situations, and provide them with effective strategies to help the child who is being targeted get out of a potentially unsafe situation. Respondents discussed that children are able to help deter bullying through a variety of different means including: actively standing up to the bully and telling them to stop, drawing the child being targeted away from the bully, and/or informing an adult of the situation in order to get assistance. Previous research has also discussed the importance of implementing programs and curriculum focused on training students to stand up and intervene in bullying situations (Padgett & Notar, 2013). Several respondents discussed that they work with bystanders to gain a better understanding of what to do in bullying situations by role-playing effective ways to step in and help another student.

Four participants in the current study identified fear of retaliation as one of the main reasons children do not intervene in bullying situations. Respondents discussed that in addition to not necessarily knowing what to do children believe that in many instances if they choose to do something, they will become targeted. This was a common theme in previous research as well surrounding the tendency for bystanders to choose not to intervene due to fear of becoming the victim and the fear of becoming unpopular with peers (Estell et al., 2008).

Participants reported that bystanders would most often report bullying instances to an adult in an effort to get help for the student who may be involved in a bullying

situation. The majority of participants did not report bystander involvement in instances when one student appeared to be bullying another student in terms of joining in with the bully and/or provoking the bully to instigate of continue to target another student. It is important to note that previous literature did find that bystanders often instigate students to initiate physical and verbal abuse towards other children, and encourage the continuation of this abuse (Ramirez, 2013).   Previous research also spoke to the tendency of bystanders to begin targeting students who were repeated targets of bullies (Mongan et al., 2009), where the participants involved in the current study did not report this, aside from the respondent employed at a high school, who did report the tendency of other students to side with the bully and join in. This may indicate that children in elementary school have a tendency to want to help children in bullying situations, where high school students may see getting involved in bullying as the preferred course of action.

Implications for Social Work Practice

        Based on the prevalence of bullying within schools, and the negative effects this can have on children, it is important to continue to work with children on how to build positive peer relationships, and ensure that they feel valued and respected as individuals. Bullying prevention and intervention efforts currently being utilized in a sample of schools in Minnesota add to the previous literature surrounding the importance of continuing to educate and work with students on what to do in bullying situations. This study has implications for individuals practicing social work based on its ability to offer further bullying prevention and intervention efforts that have been found effective among a sample of school social workers, the importance of understanding the impact bystanders

can have when bullying occurs, and the benefits of developing programs and curriculum focused on social and emotional learning.

It is important for social workers employed in the schools, and those who are working with children who are involved in bullying situations, to be aware of how to effectively prevent and intervene when children are having bullying issues. This study discussed several efforts that were found effective in dealing with bullying within the schools including: creating a positive school climate, utilizing curriculum and other individualized interventions, developing positive relationships with students, increasing the level of adult supervision within the schools, and ensuring consistent expectations and common language throughout the school. Social workers should familiarize themselves with previous research surrounding bullying prevention and intervention efforts, and attempt to implement consistent school-wide programming aimed at counteracting the negative effects of bullying. In addition to consistency throughout the school, social workers should be comfortable using various tools and techniques based on the individual needs of each student involved in bullying situations, prevention, and intervention efforts.

This study spoke to the impact that bystanders can have in bullying situations. Respondents discussed the importance of educating bystanders on how to stand up for children being targeted, and how to be a healthy bystander as opposed to standing by while someone else is being hurt. It is important that social workers help students understand what bullying is, what it looks like, and what they can do to help someone who is being bullied. Social workers should allow students the opportunity to practice standing up to bullies in order to alleviate some of the fear and anxiety associated with getting involved in a difficult situation through role-playing and continued education.

Social workers should encourage students to develop advocacy skills for oneself and others, and to make choices that will have a positive impact.

The current study discussed the benefits of teaching children social and emotional learning skills, including problem-solving, empathy, emotional management, impulse control, self-regulation, and how to interact with peers. Participants discussed that if children are taught how to handle conflict and stress appropriately, this will decrease the likeliness that they would bully others. Social workers should incorporate social and emotional learning in their practice with children. Children need to have an understanding of how to monitor their own actions and reactions, and how to facilitate positive interactions with peers. Social workers should attempt to allow children to practice social skills on a regular basis in order to process their reactions and interactions in various situations, and help them continue to develop these skill sets for use in daily interactions with peers and adults.

The current study identified the importance of addressing bullying at a systemic level. Several respondents mentioned the need for further legislative initiatives throughout the state aimed at bully prevention in order to have formal policy in place supporting the need to continue working to ensure children are safe at school. Recently, Minnesota Governor Dayton signed the Safe and Supportive School Acts, a bullying prevention bill, into law, which replaced a 37-word bullying prevention law previously in place in Minnesota. The law discusses the need for schools to develop more comprehensive bullying prevention and intervention strategies, and further reduce bullying among students in Minnesota schools. The passage of the Safe and Supportive School Act recognizes bullying as a widespread issue throughout Minnesota schools, and

speaks to the importance of continuing to work towards creating more thorough bullying prevention initiatives throughout the state.

Strengths and Limitations

There are several strengths to this study. There is a substantial amount of research that has been completed surrounding bullying in schools, including various prevention programs being utilized. This study builds upon the previous research by gathering insight into which prevention programs, curriculum, and efforts are found most effective among school social workers. This offers a practice-based perspective on how these programs look "on the ground", including what works/doesn't work, and what needs to be translated/modified.   Another strength of this study is that the participants were from schools with varying bullying prevention programs and curriculum in place, both implicit and explicit. This allowed for various perspectives, and a comparative analysis of the data in order to determine what is working well and what is not working well to effectively prevent and respond to bullying in the schools.

There are several potential limitations to this study. First, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the results. The respondents may hold personal biases that may or may not be disclosed during the interview, and responses may not be generalized to that of a larger sample. The semi-structured format of the interview allowed the researcher to structure questions in a way that the information obtained would pertain to the overall research question, which may have led the respondents to answer questions in a particular way. There is potential researcher bias surrounding the study due to a tendency to support school-wide prevention efforts that include the involvement of bystanders to help alleviate bullying in schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study looked at various prevention and intervention efforts that school social workers utilize in order to promote positive peer relationships. Going forward, it would be beneficial to determine if the various programs, curriculum, and techniques reported as being beneficial to bullying prevention throughout this study have been found effective among a larger sample of schools, as well as other settings such as residential treatment centers and day-treatment programs, in order to further support which programs are most effective.

Participants throughout this study mentioned that bystanders are instrumental in bullying prevention, and further research is warranted regarding how bullying effects observers, as well as the effects of becoming actively involved in a bullying situation. The current research found that bystanders tend to tell an adult when they witness bullying, whereas the majority of previous research looked at for this study found that bystanders often tend to become involved in bullying, and further target a particular student. Future research should look at how bystanders are becoming involved in bullying situations within the school, and what this involvement looks like.

Several respondents discussed the need for schools to define bullying, and clarify the difference between bullying behavior and normal childhood conflicts. Further research surrounding how schools throughout the state of Minnesota are defining bullying, as well as the education and support they are providing to students and families in order to determine if students are involved in bullying, would be beneficial. This information could be used to further educate students and parents on how to identify and

respond to bullying instances, as well as how to identify and respond to conflict among peers.

This research offers additional insight into how to effectively prevent and intervene in bullying situations from the perspective of a sample of school social workers in Minnesota. Respondents discussed the importance of teaching social and emotional learning skills to students, the use of formal and informal programming and curriculum, creating a positive school-wide climate and practicing active supervision, and encouraging students to be active bystanders as effective ways to counter-act bullying within schools. This study contributes to previous research surrounding bullying within schools, and discusses the importance of working to enhance positive peer interactions among students.

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CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
GRSW 682 CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Bullying Prevention: How to Foster Positive Interactions Among School Aged Youth

[IRB Tracking Number: 539878-1]

I am conducting a study about anti-bullying efforts currently being utilized among a sample of Minnesota schools. This research will help determine what curriculum and anti-bullying efforts appear to be most effective at promoting positive interactions among youth and decreasing the occurrence of bullying among peers from the perspective of school social workers. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your employment as a school social worker, and your ability to speak on bullying prevention and intervention efforts currently being utilized in your school.   Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Sara E. Johnson, LSW, a graduate student at the school of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and is supervised by Dr. David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine emerging best practices currently being utilized in Minnesota schools to effectively prevent and respond to bullying among school-aged youth.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a face-to-face interview expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes.
2. Answer questions designed to look at the perceived prevalence of bullying in the schools, effects on the victims, and formal/informal bullying prevention and intervention efforts that are most effective from your professional perspective.
3. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed by myself. I intend to transcribe the interview myself, but in the event that I am not able to complete the transcription, I will hire a transcriptionist to do so who will sign a statement of confidentiality.
4. The findings of my project will be presented in a clinical research paper and will be disseminated during an oral presentation in May 2014. Your name or school will not be shared in the paper or presentation.
5. The findings of my project will be published online in my clinical research paper. Quotes may be used but will not be linked to you and your name will not be used.
6. The findings of my project may be used in the future for further scholarly writing or presentations, but your name or school will not be shared in any such writing or presentation.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. There is a risk of threat to confidentiality due to the interviews being audio-taped and transcribed, and quotations being used in the final paper and presentation. In order to mitigate these risks, I will remove any particulary identifying information in the process of transcription including your name, the name of your school, etc. While quotes will be used, I will not use any quotes that may identify you, your school, or a particular student.   The interviews will be stored on a password-protected phone and the transcriptions will be stored on a password protected computer only accessible to myself. There is also a risk due to the emotional content of the subject. I will attempt to minimize this risk by asking questions pertaining only to your professional experience with bullying prevention and intervention, and not your personal experience. You will be able to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering, and may end the interview at anytime.

There are no direct benefits for participation in this research.

Compensation:

You will receive a $5.00 coffee card as a small token of appreciation for your participation in this study prior to beginning the interview.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.   The types of records I will create include audio-recordings, and transcripts. Audio-recordings of the interviews will be stored on a password-protected device only accessible to myself.   All written research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Audio-recordings and written records with identifying information in them will be destroyed upon completion of the final research project, no later than 08.31.14.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your workplace, St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty, up until one week following the interview. Should you decide to withdraw; data collected about you will be used to complete the final research report and oral presentation, and destroyed immediately thereafter.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Sara Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 763.242.5399. You may also contact my instructor, David Roseborough, at 651.962.5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and have my interview audio recorded. I am at least 18 years of age.

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____
Print Name of Study Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   **Date**

Appendix B. Interview Guide

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself including: length of experience working in the schools/with children, school level and grades served.

2. What has been your experience with bullying prevention in the schools?

3. From your perspective, what forms of bullying are most prevalent in your setting (physical, emotional, verbal)?

   + *How often do you believe children are bullied within your school?*

   + *What characteristics, if any, do you see among children who bully others?*

   + *Do you see a difference in how boys bully versus how girls bully?*

4. Research has shown that children who are bullied may experience many adverse effects (depression, decreased self-worth, shame, helplessness), what are the common effects you perceive victims of bullying to experience at school?

   + *Do children who continue to be targeted tend to have changes in school performance/ attitudes towards school?*

   + *What coping skills do you see children use to deal with being bullied?*

5. Do you see a relationship between bullying and school violence in general?

   + *In your setting?*

6. How do you feel witnessing bullying among peer's impacts bystanders, if it does?

   + *Do children tend to intervene when they see bullying occur, participate in the bullying, or do nothing?*

   + *Are bystanders incorporated into intervention efforts? How so?*

7. Does your school utilize anti-bullying curriculum, programs, or other prevention/intervention efforts?

+ *What does this include/ focus on?*

+ *Is this utilized on a case-by-case basis, school-wide, district-wide?*

8. How are parents included in bullying prevention?

    + *Teachers?*

    + *School administration?*

    + *Community members?*

9. What have you found to be the most successful factors in bullying prevention within the schools? (Social support, parental support, school-wide implementation, increased supervision, educating bystanders, etc.)

    + Do *you feel that adult supervision factors into bullying prevention, and if so, how?*

    + *What has been ineffective?*

10. What do you see being done to foster positive interactions among students?

    + *What seems to help with inclusion among students within the school?*

    + *How do you feel schools can best increase social support among students?*

11. Any other thoughts/feelings that you would like to share/feel are important in regards to bullying prevention?