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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract The goal of this study was to report key descriptive data from 1,588 third through fifth graders who completed a survey regarding their perceptions of bullying in schools. Key findings were that 40 % of third through fifth graders reported being bullied, while girls reported being victims of bullying more often than boys. When bullying was reported to a school administrator or a parent/guardian, only about 19 % of those bullied reported that bullying stopped completely; 16 % reported that bullying had stopped for a while, and 11 % indicated that bullying never stopped and in some cases got worse. 32 % of the students reported that the school had done little or nothing to reduce bullying. Our results underscore the need for early intervention.

Keywords Bullying · School bullying · School climate · School safety

Introduction

With bullying impacting over a third of students in elementary and middle schools, it is a significant issue that warrants increased attention and intervention efforts (Bradshaw et al. 2013b; Visconti et al. 2013). Although bullying has been examined extensively in the middle and high schools, less is known regarding the characteristics of bullying among young elementary school children. The purpose of this study was to examine various aspects of bullying in elementary schools. Although there is some data exploring this phenomenon (Vlachou et al. 2011), not enough is known regarding the specific nature of these issues in the lower grade classrooms. The study reviewed the following bullying factors in grades 3 through 5 in five Massachusetts elementary schools: (a) the prevalence of bullying at school, (b) the location of bullying, (c) the participation in bullying, (d) the reporting of bullying behavior to an adult, (e) the form of bullying, and (f) the presence of school interventions. The study also reviewed if liking school or having friends in school had any impact on the prevalence of bullying. Finally, the bullying factors were examined by gender and grade.

The literature revealed that many of the reported cases of bullying in the lower grade classrooms are not getting the necessary adult intervention. According to Olweus (1993), students feel most vulnerable to bullying in locations where there is the least amount of supervision. These bullying behaviors, present in elementary schools, place children at risk for destructive, violent, and aggressive behavior as they mature (Bradshaw et al. 2013a, b). Furthermore, research has indicated that childhood bullying is linked to violence, heavy drinking and marijuana use at age 21 and later, and students involved in bullying show more impulsivity and tend to gravitate towards antisocial peers (Finkelhor et al. 2006; Kim et al. 2011; Spargue and Nishioka 2012). In fact, research suggests that many of the factors associated with bullying are associated with sexual violence (Basile et al. 2009). Bullying and the role it plays in school shootings has been raised repeatedly. An understanding of bullying in elementary schools may contribute to that understanding (Dill et al. 2011).

Understanding bullying in elementary schools (e.g., the locations, forms, and perceived effectiveness of prevention

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strategies) is crucial. Elementary school victims reported bullying occurring at greater rates on the playground/schoolyard than did secondary school victims (Vaillancourt et al. 2010). Knowing the "hot spots," or where and when bullying occurs, is vital to reducing bullying (Vaillancourt et al. 2010).

Bullying

Bradshaw et al. (2013a, 2013b) defined bullying as proactive aggression that repeatedly occurs and involves a power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim. There are several roles of bullying, including (a) bullies, (b) victims, (c) bully-victims, (d) bystanders, and (e) outsiders (Pronk et al. 2013). Bullying can take on many forms, such as physical bullying (hitting, pushing, etc.), verbal aggression (e.g., face-to-face name calling), rumor spreading, and sexual comments (Bradshaw et al. 2013a, b). Bradshaw and Waasdorp (2009) concluded that being involved in bullying, either as the bully or the victim, results in a child reporting a feeling of disconnect and lack of safety at school. Guerra et al. (2011) suggested that children who view their schools as unsafe or inequitable will be less likely to follow the rules and will expect their peers to do the same. Healy et al. (2013) discussed the serious consequences of bullying, including (a) behavior problems, (b) internalizing problems, and (c) increased loneliness and school avoidance. In addition, Healy et al. noted that children who are bullied have fewer friends. One of the causes of bullying could be poor social competence. Shaw et al. (2013) reported that those who bully are likely to exhibit other problem behaviors, such as conduct issues and less engagement in pro-social behaviors. Reijntjes et al. (2013) noted that bullying leads to higher levels of stress and increases the risk of internalized problems. Reijntjes et al. further discussed that those who bully and are bullied exhibit the poorest psychosocial functioning. Moreover, Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2011) noted that victims of bullying have adverse short- and long-term effects, such as social and emotional problems, with long-term maladjustment dependent upon their response to bullying. For example, some victims are more likely to experience indirect forms of victimization based on their patterns of response to being victimized, as well as internal and external symptoms.

Theoretical Framework

Bullying is present in most schools in the United States, reportedly affecting anywhere from 33 % (Bradshaw et al. 2013a, b) to 70 % of all students (Canter 2005). As noted by Visconti et al. (2013), "peer victimization is a significant problem worthy of the attention of both research and intervention efforts" (p. 277). Bradshaw et al. (2013b) defined bullying as aggression that is repeated, intentional and involves an imbalance of power between the aggressor and victim. As noted by Pronk et al. (2013), bullying can take on many forms including (a) physical, (b) verbal, (c) possession-directed, and (d) social/relational. There are also several roles, including (a) bullies, (b) victims, (c) bully-victims, (d) bystanders, and (e) outsiders (Pronk et al.). Bradshaw et al. (2008) reported that youth involved in bullying were less likely to report feeling safe at schools than those students identified as not involved in bullying. Visconti et al. (2013) and Bradshaw et al. (2013a, 2013b) linked bullying with several serious forms of maladjustment including (a) psychological dysfunction, (b) low academic performance, (c) social difficulties, and (d) health problems. Additionally, childhood bullying victimization is related to both negative short-term and long-term effects, such as depression, anxiety, delinquency, and criminal behavior, which can carry over into adulthood (Bradshaw et al. 2013a, b; Ttofi et al. 2011). One area of research dealing with victimization and its effects is with coping strategies. Though coping with bullying has been the focus of several empirical studies, little is known about the strategies for coping with victimization (Visconto et al. 2013) and continued research is needed. Additionally, interventions to reduce bullying have shown different levels of success in the United States (Shetgiri et al. 2013). For this reason, it is important to investigate several areas of victimization research to have an understanding for the current research endeavor.

Prevalence Research indicates that bullying does not discriminate; it affects almost every child worldwide, including all age groups, races, and cultures (Berger 2007). Childhood bullying victimization is significantly related to higher rates of depression later in life (Ttofi et al. 2011) and indicates the need for early implementation of bullying prevention programs and intervention efforts. Vlachou et al. (2011) reported that preschool children as young as four are involved in incidents of bullying and have taken on the roles of bully, victim, and bully-victim. According to Bauer et al. (2008), approximately 21 % of primary school educators (Prekindergarten – 2) across the nation reported student bullying in schools on a daily or weekly basis.

Overall, the prevalence of bullying among students varies across studies as a result of the methodology and definition of bullying used (Hallford et al. 2006). Shetgiri et al. (2013) noted that research is showing a decrease in bullying and victimization, possibly due to bullying prevention interventions. However, research has shown that bullies in the middle school years tend to be more sneaky, and incidents of bullying often goes unreported because students prefer that adults witness bullying incidents firsthand (Brunner and Lewis 2008). In a study by Bradshaw et al. (2007), teachers underestimated incidents of bullying and reported higher levels of school safety than students, who believed that teachers would make the bullying situation worse if they tried to intervene.

Perceptions Negative student perceptions of the school climate due to bullying have been shown to play a role in aggressive behavior toward others, and increase the likelihood that students will skip school or carry a weapon (Meyer-Adams and Conner 2008). Childhood bullying is a common theme in many incidents of school violence (Dill et al. 2011). Therefore, implementing anti-bullying programs in schools may help improve school climate and the quality of life for many students (Black and Washington 2008). Adolescents' perceptions of peer acceptance significantly predicted reductions in aggressive behavior and long-term social success (McElhaney et al. 2008). Watson (2006) reported a decrease in problematic behavior among middle school students who had participated in character education and intervention activities while in elementary school. In a study by Timmermanis and Wiener (2011), a strong association was reported between students' perceptions of social support and victimization. Students who perceived low overall social support from peers and families experienced higher rates of victimization. Because social relationships and peer groups are important, especially in middle school, it is important for children to know which trusted individuals they can go to in times of distress (Espelage and Swearer 2003; Estell et al. 2009). Additionally, helping a child find a friend can reduce the likelihood of victimization due to relational bullying (Kevorkian and D'Antona 2008).

Good Friends and School Friendships play an essential role in a child's academic and social well-being in the early grades (Estell et al. 2009). Wang et al. (2009) reported that students with more friends are more likely to be involved in bullying but less likely to be victims of bullying. Shetgiri et al. (2013) noted that poor relationships with classmates are associated with an increased risk for bullying. Additionally, Thornton et al. (2012) analyzed the significant role other classmates play in encouraging the bully by providing reinforcing behaviors (such as laughing). As explored by Shaw et al. (2013), acceptance in peer groups, having friends who are able to assist and defend, and having more friends have shown to help protect against victimization. Healy et al. (2013) agreed that having more friends helped protect students from bullying. Pronk et al. (2013) noted that having friends are not only important to avoiding victimization, but prosocial behaviors are important to those friends of and friendly to victims. Goswami (2012) pointed out that children's relationships with family and friends are two domains of their well-being, as well as important to avoiding victimization. Goswami further noted that children's relationships with their teachers have an impact on their well-being. Pronk et al. (2013) determined that outsiders and defenders of victims were likely to use indirect measures, such as telling a teacher to defend against bullying. Visconti et al. (2013) noted that seeking support of teachers is an important coping mechanism of victimization. Visconti et al. further discussed the importance of teachers handling reports of victimizations in ways that prevent further victimization while addressing inappropriate behavior.

Reporting to an Adult Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2011) commented that the way in which children respond to victimization influences the duration and emotional impact of the experience. It is imperative to a child's well-being to feel a sense of support from teachers and peers (Flaspohler et al. 2009). Feeling a sense of support from one's social network is essential to psychological welfare (Martinez et al. 2011). Healy et al. (2013) discussed the importance of family support of individual victims at school, and noted that warm responsiveness and over-directives help children regulate their emotions, which may prevent additional victimization. Furthermore, Tenenbaum et al. (2011) concurred that children who are bullied need additional support and adult intervention, and Visconti et al. (2013) discussed that victims of bullying are encouraged to report to an adult and that most parents encourage the victim to fight back. Additionally, Reijntjes et al. (2013) noted that parents of bullies should exhibit a zero tolerance policy for bullying by punishing when needed and explaining how frightening and scary bullying is. Finally, Goswami (2012) contended that adult relationships are important to the subjective well-being of children. Therefore, in conclusion, the parent plays an important role in avoiding and preventing bullying victims from continuing to be victimized.

Effects

Teisl et al. (2012) investigated the effects of child maltreatment in children ages 6–13 and found that children raised in a hostile home environment were more likely to be identified as bullies due to the negative impact the maltreatment had on their social development. Yeager et al. (2011) posited that all adolescents are involved in peer conflicts at some point in their lives, and they can respond to that conflict in a prosocial way or in a hostile way. Adults and teachers can help students handle the conflict effectively and move on by teaching them pro-social ways to deal with incidents of bullying and social setbacks, as well as how to regulate the negative emotions they experience (Yeager et al. 2011). Research consistently showed the detrimental effects bullying could have on students. Cooper (2011) reported that high school students' GPAs decreased significantly as a result of being bullied. Adams and Lawrence (2011) found that middle and high school students who reported bullying victimization felt isolated and the effects of bullying continued even after the school years into college and the workplace.

Prevention Efforts

In a meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) determined that school-based anti-bullying programs are effective overall. Furthermore, school bullying was reduced by an average of 20–23 % and victimization was reduced by 17–20 %. Vital program elements that were related to decreased bullying "were parent training/meetings, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, classroom management, teacher training, classroom rules, a whole-school anti-bullying policy, school conferences, information for parents, and cooperative group work" (Ttofi and Farrington 2011, p. 41). In addition, it is important for teachers and administrators to be in agreement regarding bullying prevention efforts in order to create a strong unified support system in schools (Kennedy et al. 2012).

Because bullying is evident in preschool children, early implementation of bullying prevention programs and intervention efforts is necessary to ensure school safety (Vlachou et al. 2011). Additionally, as it related to relational aggression in preschool programs among girls, Leff and Crick (2010) recommend the development of early intervention programs to improve the health and well-being of school-age children, the school climate, and communities. Brown et al. (2011) reported positive effects with third through fifth grade students in 33 schools after 3 years of implementation of a bullying prevention program. Lower levels of physical bullying, fewer school bullying related problems, and improved school climates were reported (Brown et al. 2011). Polanin et al. (2012) advised school administrators to implement anti-bullying programs with a specific focus on bystander intervention behavior. Their research indicated that programs were more effective when students were explicitly taught and encouraged to act in a prosocial manner and to intervene when necessary (Polanin et al. 2012).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore critical characteristics of young childhood bullying. The study explored multiple characteristics of bullying related to (a) the prevalence of bullying at school, (b) the location of bullying, (c) the participation in bullying, (d) the reporting of bullying behavior to an adult, (e) the form of bullying, and (f) the presence of school interventions. Further exploration regarding the extent to which children liked school and endorsed having good friends at school was conducted. Finally, gender and grade differences were explored.

Methods

To assess general bullying factors and the grade and gender differences related to perceptions of bullying, third through fifth graders from Massachusetts were asked to complete a bullying survey. The data source for this study was a modified version of the Olweus Bullying Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) (Olweus 1993).

Participants

The general sample consisted of 1,588 participants/surveys (781 male, 801 female; age range, 8–11 years). The primary language of all participants was English. The participants were enrolled in five elementary schools in Massachusetts. The survey contained 45 items that assessed student bullying across six factors (a) the prevalence of bullying at school, (b) the prevalence of cyberbullying, (c) the location of bullying, (c) the participation in bullying, (e) the reporting of bullying behavior to an adult, and (f) the form of bullying that students reported (e.g., hit, kicked, pushed or shoved another student). The responses ranged from "it has not happened to me" to "it happens several times a week".

The data was collected from third- through fifth-grade students attending five elementary schools in the 2008–2009 and 2010–2011 school year. This study utilized a survey approach with a cross-sectional design to explore third through fifth-grade students' perceptions of bullying.

Instrument

The OBVQ (Dan Olweus, PhD., University of Bergen, Norway) is the most widely used, self-administered, bullying questionnaire (Lee and Cornell 2009), and intended to measure and reduce bullying in schools. The program targets bullying at three levels: (a) the school, (b) the classroom, and (c) the individual. A total of 1,168 school students in grades 3, 4, and 5 who attended 5 elementary schools in the Boston area completed Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ)

Table 1 Distribution of students by grade, by gender and number bullied

Grade	Students	Boys	Bullied	Girls	Bullied
3rd Grade	553	289 (52.3 %)	97 (33.6 %)	264 (47.7 %)	128 (48.5 %)
4th Grade	547	272 (49.7 %)	111 (40.8 %)	275 (50.3 %)	116 (42.2 %)
5th Grade	488	246 (50.4 %)	83 (33.7 %)	242 (49.6 %)	98 (40.5 %)
Total	1,588	807 (50.8 %)	291 (36.8 %)	781 (49.2 %)	342 (43.8 %)

Table 2 Bullying by question category

Grade	Students	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
3rd	553							
Boys	289	108	98	86	97	48	60	53
Girls	264	138	132	79	102	54	83	82
4th	547							
Boys	272	107	89	79	91	33	53	43
Girls	275	111	112	56	96	34	56	45
5th	488							
Boys	246	95	60	51	61	27	43	36
Girls	242	100	88	28	82	28	39	37

Note: Totals may not add since bullying may have occurred in more than one category

examining the participants' experience with bullying, as victims, perpetrators, and witnesses. Lee et al. (2006) concluded that "more students were identified as bullies and victims by peer nomination than by self-report" (para. 15). Lee and Cornell (2009) concluded that there is a lack of supported research validating self-reported bullying, although the study did obtain evidence of the existence of a relationship between self-report and peer nominations.

According to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Clemson.edu), the first bullying evaluation took place in Bergen, Norway, between 1983 and 1985, and included 2, 500 students in grades 5–8. Furthermore, an additional six additional studies were conducted, involving more than 20, 000 students from over 150 schools. The effectiveness of the Olweus Bullying Program resulted in a reduction of victim self-reporting of approximately 40 % for most age and grade comparisons, and a reduction of about 51 % for self-reported victimization. Other studies in South Carolina had similar results with reductions of about 16 % in bullying in schools where bullying intervention was instituted.

Kyriakides et al. (2006) examined the validity of the OBVQ, sampling 335 students from seven primary schools in Greece, using the Rasch measurement model. The results of the analysis concluded that the OBVQ had acceptable psychometric properties and results. "Support was also provided for the relative prevalence of verbal, indirect and physical bullying" (p. 781). The results of this study represented a reliability factor greater than 0.85, representing satisfactory reliability for the use of the OBVQ.

Procedures

About 2,000 students in five elementary schools in Massachusetts were provided 45 min to complete an online bullying survey after obtaining permission from their parents. The students were given a block of time to complete the survey. Proctors were present to assist in case of difficulties with the technology and answer any questions the students had while completing the survey.

Design A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey approach was implemented to explore the bullying characteristics of the participants. The return (response) rate was 79 %.

Analyses

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the data in order to obtain a clear understanding of the sample characteristics. Measures of central tendency (i.e., means, medians and other percentiles) and dispersion (i.e., standard deviations, ranges) were computed for continuous data. Frequency distributions were estimated for the categorical data.

Results

Data were collected from 1,588 students in 3rd through 5th grade at five elementary schools in Massachusetts over a 2-years period. The survey was comprised of approximately 84 questions ranging from whether they liked school or not, how many friends they had, frequency of bullying, whether they participated in school activities or

Table 3 Victims of bullying by grade, by gender, and dislike school, to like school

Grade	Students	Dislike school	Neither like nor dislike	Liked or liked very much
3rd	553			
Boys	289	7	30	60
Girls	264	12	19	97
4th	547			
Boys	272	17	28	66
Girls	275	8	14	94
5th	488			
Boys	246	13	23	47
Girls	242	5	18	75

Table 4 Bullying by grade, by gender and by whom

Grade	Students	1 Girl	Several girls	1 Boy	Several boys	Both boys and girls
3rd	553					
Boys	289	20	4	53	15	23
Girls	264	70	10	24	9	33
4th	547					
Boys	272	15	4	62	16	19
Girls	275	63	20	25	3	31
5th	488					
Boys	246	9	2	39	14	21
Girls	242	42	20	9	7	29

sports, which activity or sport, whether or not bullying was reported, where the bullying occurred, and form of bullying. Note that the bullying totals in each table may not equal each other as some of the questions in several categories were left blank (unanswered).

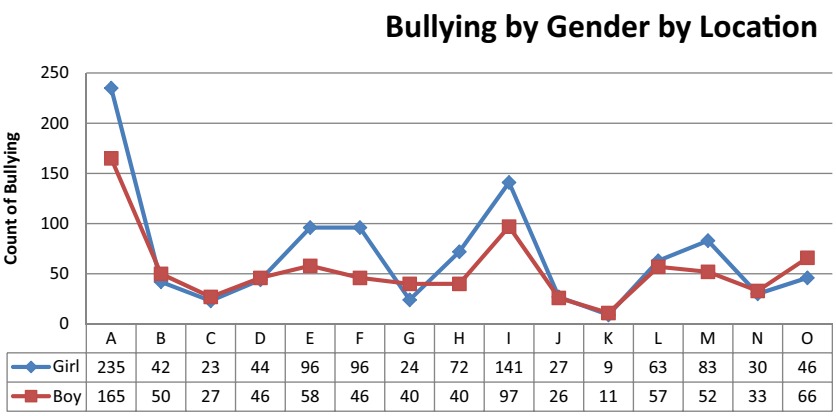
Of the 1,588 students, an alarming 40 % reported that they had been bullied. Bullying was defined as ranging in frequency between at least once, to several times per week, over the previous couple of months. These statistics were reported at five elementary schools involving 3rd through 5th grade students over 2 years. The distribution of these bullied students are shown on Table 1.

The distribution of boys and girls throughout the reported grades is approximately equal, with boys representing 50.8 % of the students and girls representing 49.2 % of the students. Furthermore, even at the individual grade levels, the distribution between boys and girls is approximately the same. The distribution of boys and girls at each grade level, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade are: 52.3 and 47.7 %; 49.7 and 50.3 %; and 50.4 and 49.6 %, respectively. Although approximately 37 % (291 of 807) of the boys reported being victims of bullying, the girls reported that they were victims of bullying at a higher rate than the boys, with 44 % (342 of 781) of the girls reporting that they were victims of bullying. Even at the individual grade levels, girls reported being victims of bullying at a higher rate than the boys.

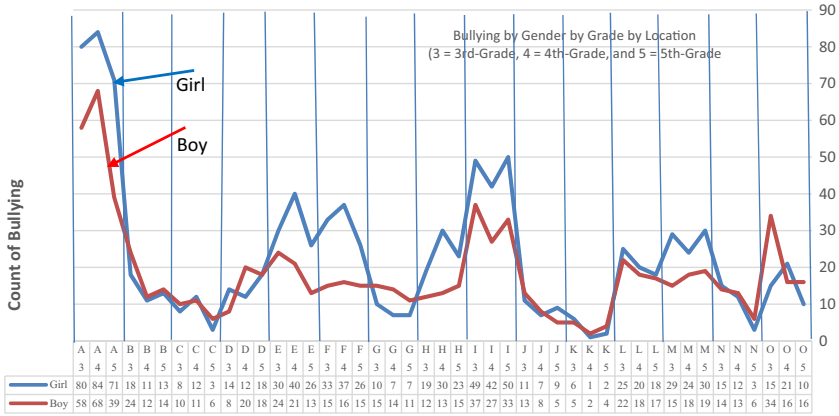
Whereas the percentage of reported bullying by girls decreased each year from 3rd grade to 5th grade, boys reported approximately the same percentage each year, with no discernable decrease, except for the 4th grade boys who reported being victims of bullying at a higher rate than in the previous and subsequent years. Bullying was categorized into seven different groupings, namely: called names, ignored, kicked/pushed, rumors, money taken away, forced to do things, and/or based on race, gender or color. Table 2 depicts bullying by question category: (a) I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way, (b) Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or completely ignored me, (c) I was kicked, pushed, or shoved around, (d) Other students told lies or spread false rumors about me and tried to make others not like me, (e) I had money or other things taken away from me or damaged, (f) I was threatened or forced to do things I did not want to do, and (g) I was bullied with mean names or comments about my race, gender, or color.

On the question of liking or disliking school, 136 students disliked school, 321 students neither liked nor disliked school, and 1,138 students either liked school or liked school very much. Of the 136 students who disliked school, 62 (45.6 %) reported that they had been victims of bullying. Of the 321 students who neither liked nor disliked school, 132 (41 %) reported being victims of bullying. Whereas, of the 1,138

Graph 1 Bullying by gender by location



Graph 2 Bullying by gender by grade by location



who either liked school or liked school very much, 439 (38.6 %) reported being victims of bullying. The survey results on bullying favored those students that did not like school, but it did not discriminate against those students that either liked school or liked school very much, as this category was also linked to being victims of bullying. Table 3 further breaks down these three categories of liking/disliking school by grade level and by gender.

The statistics in Table 1 indicate in each school grade that the girls reported being victims of bullying more often than the boys. Additionally, the overall rate of bullying reported by girls averaged 43.8 % for the three school grades, whereas the boys' report of bullying averaged 36.8 %. Table 3 displays the same results overall, that girls are victims of bullying more often than boys. Albeit in five categories, two in the "dislike school" and in all "neither like nor dislike" school, the boys reported being the victims of bullying more often than the girls.

In determining who perpetrated the bullying against each gender, one of the survey questions queried if the bullying occurred by a boy or a girl, or by a mixed group of boys and girls. Of the 1,558 students, 219 reported being a bullied by one girl, 60 reported being bullied by several girls, 212 by one boy, 64 by several boys, and 156 victims reported bullying by both boys and girls. Table 4 breaks down these bullying types by grade and gender. The data from Table 4 clearly indicates that girl on girl and boy on boy are the two most prevalent forms of bullying.

Bullying occurs in the school grounds and continues outside of the school grounds. Bullying was reported to have taken place throughout the school grounds: lunchroom, hallways, playground, and even while participating in sports or other school activities. Bullying was also reported while waiting for the school bus and within the school bus, as well as to and from school. Graphs 1 and 2 display the reported location (A–O) where bullying occurred, and Table 5 provides the location descriptions for the A-O identified in Graphs 1 and 2. The majority of reported bullying occurred on the playground during recess, followed by the lunchroom. Note that bullying occurred while the students were in the presence of adult supervision.

Bullying was not only verbal, but with the use of technology (eg., text messages, the internet, and mobile phone), bullying has taken on a new meaning. About 10 % of the students reported being bullied by one of these technology platforms.

When bullying was reported to a school administrator, or parent/guardian, only about 19 % of those bullied reported that bullying stopped completely; 16 % reported that bullying had stopped for a while, but then continued, and 11 % indicated that bullying never stopped and in some cases got worse. In addition, approximately 32 % of the students reported that the schools have done little or nothing to reduce bullying in the school.

Playground Activities Study

The highest reported bullying for all three grades (3rd, 4th and 5th), as shown in Table 6, whether boys or girls, were those participating in playground activities during school as shown on Graph 2, and reported as A in the location descriptions as shown in Table 5. These playground activities pertain to activities sanctioned by the school during the school day. These recess activities are supposed to promote peer interactions and development, and are a complement to PE activities.

Table 5 Location descriptions

A	Playground during recess	I	Lunchroom
B	Playground Before School	J	To and From School
C	Playground After School	K	School Bus Stop
D	Hallways/Stairwells	L	On the School Buys
E	Classroom with Teacher Present	M	Somewhere Else in School
F	Classroom Without Teacher Present	N	After School Program
G	Bathroom	O	In my Sports Team
H	PE Class		

Table 6 Bullied in playground activities with significance level of 0.000

Boys (3rd Grade)	Boys (4th Grade)	Boys (5th Grade)	Girls (3rd Grade)	Girls (4th Grade)	Girls (5th Grade)
58 (23 %)	68 (33 %)	38 (18 %)	80 (45 %)	84 (50 %)	71 (45 %)

For the boys at all grade levels, 642 boys reported that they had never been bullied; whereas for the girls, 546 reported that they had never been bullied during playground activities during recess.

Discussion

The prevalence of bullying in elementary schools was alarming, with 40 % of 3rd through 5th graders reporting being bullied. Girls reported being victims of bullying more often than boys. Rigby and Johnson (2006) found similarities between primary and secondary school students, but their findings suggest that younger students were more likely to express interest and readiness in intervening. Gini et al. (2008) supported the importance of working with children at young age. They found that prosocial behavior toward victims had positive reactions and did not endorse the bullying behavior, and the positive attitude toward victims was higher in younger grades. Pozzoli and Gini (2013) supported that holding positive attitudes toward victims led students to feel higher personal responsibility for intervention. This study provides support that we must start talking about bullying behaviors in the primary years. The current study supports training for teachers and school administrators, as approximately 32 % of the students reported that the schools have done little or nothing to reduce bullying in the school. Smith et al. (2012) agree with the finding that primary schools are more effective at communicating and evaluating bullying policies.

Implications of Findings

To better understand the genesis and spread of bullying in our schools, it is important to ask young elementary students directly about their experiences. This current study expands our understanding of not only the type of bullying, but also the underlying attitudes toward this behavior. When the young age of the participants is considered, 40 % is a distressing number of students who have experienced bullying. This provides strong support for the need to begin prevention efforts at a very early age, long before third grade. It is important to note that as children get older, the attitudes toward victims become less sympathetic. Furthermore, researchers have found that often children have a tendency to dislike the victims and admire the bully (Rigby 2012). This factor contributes to a climate that may support bullying behavior and damage the general school climate.

Also, it is important to further examine bullying prevention as more than a training session for staff, but rather a multifaceted, ongoing effort that sends a consistent message over time. Bullying prevention strategies need to target multiple aspects of the school environment, (that is individual, classroom, and school) to reduce school violence. This focus on a continuum of education and support is crucial to teach children how to respond when they are witnessing or being targeted by the bullying behavior of others. One of the reasons students are vulnerable to victimization is that they do not know how to respond when confronted with these situations. The child seldom knows whether to address the bully directly or to tell an adult. According to the literature, it is much more complicated than that. Children's ability to respond and to cope with a bullying situation depends greatly on their social-emotional development; support and classroom discussion needs to be adjusted accordingly (Rock and Baird 2012). Rock & Baird support that a child as young as six can intervene. Therefore, it is critical to give children, at an early age, the opportunity to develop strategies to reduce bullying. Future studies should look at prevention and intervention strategies that are most effective with young children.

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