Effect of Bullying

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

The Effects of School Bullying on Students' Perceptions of the School Environment

OU L A Y A S A A D S A M H O U N

July 2009
The Effects of School Bullying on Students' Perceptions of the School Environment

A project by

Oulaya Saad Samhoun
Lebanese American University

Submitted to the Lebanese American University in Beirut
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education

July 2009
Plagiarism Policy Compliance Statement

I certify that I have read and understood LAU’s Plagiarism Policy. I understand that failure to comply with this Policy can lead to academic and disciplinary actions against me.

This work is substantially my own, and to the extent that any part of this work is not my own I have indicated that by acknowledging its sources.

Name: Oulaya Saad Samhoun

Signature: [Signature]

Date: July 20, 2009
I grant the LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY the right to use this work, irrespective of any copyright, for the University’s own purpose without cost to the university or its students and employees. I further agree that the University may reproduce and provide single copies of the work to the public for the cost of reproduction.
Lebanese American University

School of Arts and Sciences - Beirut Campus

Project approval Form

Student Name: Oulaya Samhoun
I.D. #: 199802940

Project Title: The Effects of School Bullying on Students' Perceptions of the School Environment

Program: Master of Arts in Education

Department: Education

School: Arts and Sciences

Approved by:

Project Advisor: Dr. Samar Zebian, Assistant Professor

Member: Dr. Huda Abdo, Associate Professor

Date: July 10, 2009
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my endless gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Samar Zebian who guided me through the whole research. Her continuous support and optimism made the writing of this project possible and made it an enriching learning experience.

I would like to thank Dr. Huda Abdo who was supportive and insightful. Her encouragement and her faith in me helped me reach my goal.

I am grateful to my friend Talar Bogharian Partiyan who provided me with constant support and help.

I thank my husband Maher Jawad for all the love, emotional support and encouragement he gave me. He went beyond his way to provide me with a calm setting at home. His care and love enabled me to complete this project. I thank him for believing in me.

At the end, I would like to thank my mom, Sanaa Samhoun for helping me become the person I am today. Her full dedication made me a stronger person; she guided me, and supported me unconditionally.
To my dad
Table of Contents

Abstract

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction
  Context of the Problem
  Objectives of the Study
  Rationale and Significance of the Project
  Research Questions
  Operational Definition
  The School's Bullying Policy - Anti-Harrassment Policy

CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature
  Introduction
  Direct and Indirect Bullying
  Reasons for Bullying
  Bullying in Lebanon and Other Eastern Mediterranean Countries
  Effects of Bullying

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology
  Introduction
  Participants
  Procedure
  Instrument

CHAPTER FOUR: Results
  Introduction
  Students Report Engaging in Bullying and Being Exposed to Victimization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A (Questionnaire for Students)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B (Bully and Victim Scales)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C (Perception of School Environment Scale)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D (Perception of Prevention/Intervention Scale)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E (The School's Academic Expectations)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The aim of this project was to examine the perceptions of students affected by school bullying in a school in Beirut, Lebanon, so that prevention/intervention actions could take place in the school to minimize bullying incidents. The target population was 47 middle school students selected from grades six, seven and eight. The aim was to investigate students’ perceptions of their school and how it is affected when there is a number of bullying incidents occurring in the school. A students’ survey was conducted by students’ humanities teachers during regular humanities period, which assessed the amount of bullying occurring in the middle school, and the academic and emotional effects of bullying on students. The teachers were not aware of the aim of this research, so that their input would not affect the students’ responses. The results from the questionnaire were very low, therefore students could not be grouped as bullies and victims consequently perceptions of participants as a group could not be studied. However, data was explored; frequencies were analyzed, mean levels, and a MANOVA were conducted.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Context of the Problem

The middle school phase; grades six, seven and eight, is a critical phase regarding bullying. Bullying problems predominantly occur during this stage which deserves attention because it is a period, labeled as a “brutalizing period” (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000, p. 722). Research indicates that this period is critical due to the biological and social changes that happen during adolescence. The rapid body changes initiate remarkable changes in adolescents peer group patterns and status. As they enter a new larger school, adolescents tend to be selective in choosing their peers, and search for peer agreement and support. To achieve this, adolescents exhibit aggressive behavior in order to maintain a certain status among peers (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Bullying is an unhealthy phenomenon, which could lead to serious problems in people’s mental well-being. Previous research on the topic, show evidence that children who were bullied during their adolescence are at risk of developing binge eating disorder as well as mental disorders (Striegel-Moore, Dohm, Pike, Wilfley, & Fairburn, 2002).

Ken Rigby (2003) provided evidence that bullying had severe consequences on victims. In his study, he indentified four categories of negative health conditions on victims of bullying; low psychological well-being which includes sadness, anger and low self-esteem, poor social adjustment, and that consists of dislike of one’s environment, loneliness and isolation, psychological distress through which one suffers from high levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts, and physical symptoms where obvious signs of physical disorder are manifested (Rigby, 2003). In addition, results from
a survey conducted by Elliot (1992), indicated that 8% of students confirmed that bullying affected their lives to the extent that they tried committing suicide, running away, refused to go to school or been constantly sick (Cullingford & Morrison, 1995). Moreover, Morrison (2009) conducted a study that revealed that targets of bullying are affected negatively; victims’ anxiety level is high, they are afraid, and they fail to concentrate at school (Morrison, 2009). Anxiety is a prevalent disorder that victims have as a result of bullying and some children somatize it and it becomes a serious physical condition. In addition, victims of bullying experience problematic relationships and problem behavior. According to research these problems are relatively constant over time (Craig & Pepler, 2003).

Objectives of the Study

This research aims at examining middle school students’ perceptions of their school in Beirut, Lebanon as a consequence of bullying. The main focus is to compare the perceptions of bullies and victims of their school; whether they feel connected to their school or not, as a result of bullying incidents, whether they are affected academically, and whether they believe that adults are making enough effort at the prevention/intervention level regarding bullying.

Rationale and Significance of the Project

This study will be of great significance to school teachers, administrators and counselors regarding bullying, since it reveals different perspectives of the school environment among students; the data collected will help in identifying some reasons for bullying incidents (lack of supervision, adults not giving consequences to bullies). In addition, the data will help in developing intervention strategies, through asking students
about their willingness to receive training on listening and verbal skills, which will help them diffuse and resolve conflicts. The data collected will help school staff in developing prevention and intervention strategies that will help them create a safe, warm and welcoming atmosphere for their students. When students are provided with a safe atmosphere at school, they would connect more to their school and they would develop a sense of belongingness to their community. By increasing adult supervision in the “areas of danger” in the school, we would be decreasing acts of bullying. Moreover, when the school staff have data of the number of students bullied in their school, they could create a support system to those victims by creating training programs for the students to teach them assertiveness and to make them aware of the adults in their school that they could report to in case if any bullying incident.

Research Question

Since the effects of bullying are significant and previous research has indicated the negative impact of bullying on students, the primary goal of this paper was to answer the following question: How do memories of bullying incidents affect the perceptions of middle school students with respect to their school environment in one-American style-private school in Lebanon?

Operational Definitions

Bullying is operationally defined as a conscious and willful act of aggression and/or manipulation; it is an abuse of power by those who have it, done by one or more people against another person or people. Usually bullying is directed towards one victim or occurs serially and/or randomly, it is premeditated or opportunistic and it could last for a short period of time or go on for years (Sullivan, 2000).
Types of bullying have been identified: Physical bullying, which includes hitting, biting, punching, hair pulling, taking possessions, vandalizing properties etc. Verbal bullying includes calling names, making fun of others, threatening, cyber bullying etc. Social bullying such as excluding a person from a group (Lee, 2005). In this study, cyber bullying is excluded.

Middle school students are defined as students in grades six, seven and eight, ranging between the ages of 11 to 13.

Perception of the school environment is defined as whether students perceive their school as a safe place and whether they feel connected to their school.

Prevention is defined as a program designed to prevent bullying behavior from occurring among middle school students, through which students are trained on how to deal with victimization and bringing awareness on the consequences of bullying behavior.

Intervention is defined as a program designed to deal with bullying incidences when they occur, through which students become aware of the adults that they could refer to. In addition, intervention on the part of the adults should take place, e.g. consequences, contacting parents etc...

*The School’s Bullying Policy – Anti-Harassment Policy as in the Students’ Handbook*

The Middle School is committed to create a harassment-free learning environment, a safe, non-threatening environment in which students can learn and teachers can teach. What is harassment?

Harassment includes:
Physical Contact: hitting, punching, kicking, invading another's personal space.

An act of violence against a person is the ultimate form of harassment.

Verbal Harassment: being aggressive, intolerant, teasing and taunting, making degrading comments (racial, sexual, religious or personal), swearing, spreading rumors, or bullying (a conscious effort to hurt, threaten, or frighten someone).

Body Language: using unacceptable body gestures and mannerisms towards others.

Sexual: jokes, unwanted contact, leering, gestures, drawings.

If someone continues to harass you, you must be strong and tell someone (a teacher, your advisor, counselor or the principal) who is obliged to stop it.

(p.10)
CHAPTEIR TWO
Review of the Literature

Introduction

Bullying is a significant problem that almost all schools face. It is usually a source for stress causing problems at the physical, emotional and social well-being of the victim, on the short and long term (Bond, Wolfe, Tollit, Butler, Patton, 2007). Direct bullying was acknowledged in the late 1970s, (Olweus, 1978) and indirect bullying in the late 1990s, when its effects were considered as severe as the direct bullying (Olweus, 1999). There are several reasons for bullying behavior and the effects could be severe.

Direct and Indirect Bullying

The focus of earlier work on bullying was on the physical and verbal bullying exhibited directly by the bully towards the victim. The early work of Olweus (1978) emphasized direct bullying and did not tackle the indirect acts of bullying, although the effects of indirect bullying are as important as the direct one (Olweus, 1978). It was not until later when Olweus (1999) stated a full definition on the word bullying; according to Olweus bullying is illustrated as an aggressive intentional behavior, which is displayed continuously and over a period of time in a relationship that is characterized by an imbalance of power. In addition, the bullying behavior could happen without provocation, and is usually exhibited through physical contact, verbal aggression, facial gestures and intentional exclusion from a group (Olweus, 1999). By defining the word "bullying" we can understand the events that are affecting students' perceptions of their school environment. Based on the results we gather, prevention/intervention strategies
could be developed by the school administrator and counselor to directly tackle these events.

Reasons for Bullying

Bullying usually starts with teasing in search for a weak target, and when the bully gets a reaction from the aim, the teasing aggravates and becomes pushy. Children, who are able to respond smartly to teasing, might not become victims of bullies. Bullies usually bully to get a reaction of anger and tears. They do not really care for the size of the victim, his name, her braces, the accent or whether she is overweight or not. So when the victims get emotionally triggered, they would be inviting the bully to insist and to be persistent in his/her bullying. To stop all the bullying, the victims may just stop giving the bully what he/she wants... the tears, for example (Freedman, 2002).

Bullying exists in all schools, and with a wider extent to what people might think (Sullivan, 2000). Whitney and Smith (1993) conducted a worldwide research that shows evidence that bullying incidents range between 10% in high school and 27% in middle school. In the United States however, bullying incidents have a higher range. A study conducted by Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1998) illustrates that 10% of school students have been extremely victimized, and 75% reported being bullied at least one time during their school years. In addition, a literature review on bullying done by Batsche and Knoff (1994) demonstrated that from 15% to 20% of all students will come across bullying in their school years, which suggests that bullying is a serious problem since it affects one fourth of school students. According to Morrison (2009), 30% of students in grades six to ten were involved in bullying in the United States, which means that a child is bullied every seven minutes on the playground. Morrison added that four percent on the time,
adults intervene, 11% of the time peers intervene, and 85% of the time there is no intervention at all (Morrison 2009). In addition, Pearl and Dulaney (2006) stated that one in three children is a victim of bullying in the United States schools (Pearl & Dulaney, 2006). International data collected by Olweus and Alsaker (1991) highlighted the fact that nowadays bullying incidents are greater and much more violent than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, there is a significant link between bullying and criminality (Geffner, Loring & Young, 2001).

International research indicated that school bullying is widespread and occurs all over the world (Slee, 1999). A number of research was done internationally and nationally, and they all showed evidence of the occurrence of bullying in schools, which indicated that bullying is not culture or society specific (Sullivan, 2000). Sullivan added that despite cultural differences, many features of bullying are the same. Sullivan (2000) named three categories of people involved in the bullying act. First, the bully; he/she exhibits the bullying act to cause harm without fearing the consequences. Second, the bullied person also called the victimized person, who does not search to defend himself/herself efficiently, if at all. And the watchers who are the people who observe the bullying act and do nothing to stop it and even sometimes support it (Sullivan).

Pamela Orpinas and Arthur M. Horne (2006) suggested that the extent of bullying differed from school to school even within the same community. Keith Sullivan (2000) also confirmed these findings by noticing that the rate of bullying is higher in poor areas. He explained that in poor areas, people are economically depressed, and there is a higher level of alcoholism and use of drugs, theft, vandalism and higher level of one-parent families (Sullivan, 2000). These conditions promote frustrations among such
communities and the only way to express one's dissatisfaction with one's own life becomes exhibiting aggression towards a weaker person. On the other hand, Sullivan advocated that in more academically focused schools, the rate of bullying is lower. He explained that in such schools, students are more focused, more successful in their studies and are more prosocial in their attitudes and behaviors. Sullivan then concluded that a school's culture determines the extent of bullying; the existence of anti-bullying policies is much more significant than the socio-economic classification in determining the rate of bullying (Sullivan, 2000). When serious and consistent rules are implemented, schools become safe from bullying (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

*Bullying in Lebanon and other Eastern Mediterranean Countries*

Regarding the prevalence of bullying in Lebanon, the first Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) was conducted in Lebanon on October – January 5, 2005 in 100 private and public schools around Lebanon. The participants were randomly selected from grades seven, eight and nine, and the age range varied between 13 and 15 years old. The World Health Organization (WHO) developed the Global School-based Student Health survey in 2001, in collaboration with UNAIDS, UNESCO and UNICEF with the support of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the Lebanon Office of the World Health Organization have implemented the survey in Lebanon, which was one of the 19 countries that have already conducted the GSHS. The purpose of the GSHS was to present information on health behaviors and protective factors among students in order to develop prevention/intervention strategies to help with these issues (Soweid & Abou Jaoude, 2005).
Among the different sections of the survey, one section was dedicated to bullying. Results from this survey provided evidence that 33.8% of the students were bullied on one or more days during the past month; 26.9% were physically bullied; being hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors, and 16% were socially bullied; stealing or damaging property on school grounds. An observation that was significant to highlight was the comparison between Lebanon and other Eastern Mediterranean Region Countries which have conducted the Global School-based Student Health Survey; the results showed evidence that the rate of bullying in Lebanon was lower than that of Oman and Jordan, however it was higher than that of the United Arab Emirates; the percent of students in grades seven, eight, and nine, who were bullied on one or more days during the past month in Lebanon was approximately 33.9%, in Jordan approximately 46.4%, in Oman approximately 36% and in the UAE approximately 20.9% (Soweid & Abou Jaoude, 2005). According to The United Nations Development Programme, these results do not completely conform with the study done by Sullivan (2000), where he suggested that the rate of bullying is higher in poor areas. The International Poverty Centre reported that in 2007 at least 28% of the Lebanese population were under the poverty line with 8% were under extreme poverty (Laithy, Abu-Ismail & Hamdan, 2008). The UNDP’s research suggested that by calculating the Human Poverty Index, among 135 developing countries, Jordan ranked 22nd, The United Arab Emirates ranked 33rd, Lebanon ranked 38th, and Oman ranked 64th (UNDP, 2008). These findings suggest that Oman is the poorest, however, in ranked second regarding the amount of bullying, and Jordan is the most advanced in developing among the 135 countries, however, it has the highest rate of bullying, followed by The United Arab Emirates and Lebanon.
**Effects of Bullying**

When students go to school, they want to feel secure and respected by their peers and teachers. However, there are often students that become targets of bullying and victimization, which affects their academic performances, their physical and emotional health for years. Unfortunately, in some schools, the faculty and the administration do not take bullying seriously and underestimate the damage that it may lead to. Sometimes bullying is tolerated and in other cases it is ignored (Barone 1997; Colvin and others 1998). Teachers and administrators often avoid intervening with bullying because they feel that they are not well-equipped to resolve the problem (Gefner, Loring & Young, 2001).

When teachers and administrators fail to make efficient interventions, some victims try to defend themselves and that, most of the time, leads to dreadful results. In the year 2000, the U.S Secret Services concluded from a study done in 37 school shooting incidents, that the majority of the shooters had been violently victimized over a long period of time. (U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center 2000).

With regard to our main focus of this paper, research has been done on this topic in the past, and the data collected showed evidence of the negative effects of bullying on students’ perceptions of their schools; students might perceive their school as a dangerous place which might lead them to hate school and hate going to school. Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer and Perry (2003) conducted a research about peer harassment, school connectedness and academic achievement in Midwestern state, results revealed that when students were bullied, they lost connectedness to school; bullied students felt less connected to their school, made less friends and did not perceive school as a place where
they could make friends or depend on adults. The research findings showed evidence that students who felt less connected to school, tended to be absent from school. Absenteeism lead students to miss on the academic benefits and their grades dropped.

In addition, students who were not victims of bullying eventually would not feel the danger that their bullied peers would feel, and therefore would be more connected to their schools, would be motivated to go to school and thus benefited from the academic assistance provided (Eisenberg, 2003). These students were not victims of bullying because; according to Freedman (2002) they knew how to respond to bullies smartly and know how to defend themselves. When the target victim, does not give the bully what he/she wants; tears and anger, the bully becomes less interested in victimizing him/her (Freedman, 2002). The results of the research showed evidence that successful students liked school more. In addition, the data collected pointed that students who liked school all the time were the least bullied, as for the students who did not like school reported being harassed more often. In parallel, “B” students reported the least victimization incidents, “A” and “C” students reported mid-levels of harassment, as for the academically poor students, they reported the most frequent harassment (Eisenberg 2003).

Another research done in the Midwest of the United States as well, showed evidence that middle school students felt at danger and unsafe in several areas of the school, like playground, locker area, hallways, and avoided going to those areas where usually fights would happen (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001). It becomes clear that many middle school students can identify acts of bullying and know where they happen in their schools and they would not want to experience them, nor get involved in them, and this
creates a sense of fear among students which should not be the case in any learning environment.

In addition, Bradshaw, Obrennan and Sawyer (2008) examined the variation in attitudes toward aggressive retaliation and perceptions of safety among bullies, victims and bully/victims in a large Maryland public school district. The analyses indicated that bully/victims were the most likely to report feeling unsafe and not belonging to their school, whereas bullies were supporters of aggressive retaliation. Whether low achievement lead to bullying or bullying lead to low-achievement, it seems that a bully could be trapped in a vicious cycle of bullying, increasing the chances of a bully supporting acts of victimization.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Collecting data from Lebanese and international students was fundamental for understanding the prevalence of bullying behavior and their effects on the students in the school. The instrument used for collecting data was a questionnaire given to students. This chapter presents the methods and procedures for collecting data.

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited among grades six, seven and eight, in one-American style private school in Beirut, Lebanon. It is an elite school, which provides an American program to an elite Lebanese group whose parents chose an American school; international students are minorities. The middle school consists of 210 students from grades six through eight. A convenient sample of 47 students (23 boys and 24 girls), ranging between the ages 11 and 13, were asked to answer a questionnaire about bullying (see Appendix A).

Procedure

On May 12, 2009, a questionnaire was conducted among middle schoolers asking them to answer questions about bullying: whether they were involved in bullying, if they were bullies, victims, bully/victims or bystanders, whether there was adult supervision in areas where bullying incidents occurred. Another set of questions targeted the students' feelings about the school, and about their academic achievement whether they liked going to school, and whether they were high achievers, average achievers or low achievers. There were, as well, questions that measured the frequency of involvement in
bullying as a bully and as a victim. Students’ humanities teachers administered the questionnaire during regular humanities period. The teachers received training on the way the questionnaire should be administered and on how they should answer students’ questions as objectively as possible. The teachers were not aware of the purpose of the study so that they would not influence students’ responses. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously and return it to their teachers.

*Instrument*

The Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ) for Children is a 20-item-questionnaire recommended for students between the ages of six and 16 (Rigby & Slee, 1994). The Peer Relations Questionnaire assesses the predominance of different kinds of bullying in schools. It has been used in a research done by Rigby and Slee (1991) to differentiate bully, victim and prosocial behavior among students and therefore to understand the individual and the psychological well-being differences between these students in the school setting. This questionnaire was adopted and adapted to fit the research needs in this specific school in Lebanon. The Peer Relations Questionnaire (PQR) for Children is appropriate for the participants in this research since the target students were within the same age range, and the language used in it is simple and clear. The questionnaire was administered to collect data about the number of bullies, the number of victims and the effect of bullying on students’ achievement and on the perceptions of their school environment. Therefore some items were added to evaluate the students’ perceptions of their school environment, whether they perceive it as a dangerous or a safe place. Examples of questions that assess this area are: 1) As an effect of bullying, have you ever felt, a) Physically hurt or injured, b) Emotionally hurt or upset, c) Scared for your safety;
2) I feel safe at school (agree/disagree); 3) I feel I belong at this school (agree/disagree).

In addition, the Pro-Social aspect of the questionnaire was deleted since it was not the focus of the research. The adapted questionnaire was developed on the following scales:

Bully Scale: 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19

Victim Scale: 9, 11, 12, 15, 20, 21

Frequency of involvement in bullying as a bully Scale: 2, 16.1, 18.1, 19.1

Frequency of involvement in bullying as a victim Scale: 1, 15.1, 20.1, 21.1,

Perception of School Environment Scale: 3, 4, 5

Perceptions of prevention Scale: 7, 23, 25, 26

Academic achievement Scale: 8
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the following four research questions:

1. Do students in grades six, seven and eight report engaging in bullying and do they report being victimized?
2. Do bullies perceive their school environment as more safe compared to victims?
3. What is the perception of the school prevention/intervention program by bullies and victims?
4. Is there a relationship between bullying/victimization and students’ reported academic achievement?

To address these questions, descriptive statistics were generated and a MANOVA was conducted. In what follows, I will present the descriptive data for the participants who report engaging in bullying or being victimized, as well as the number of participants who report different types of perceptions about their school, and the existing prevention/intervention program.

Students Report Engaging in Bullying and Being Exposed to Victimization

Table 1 depicts the number of students who reported engaging in or experiencing different levels of bullying and victimization over the course of a month in school life. The results revealed that the vast majority of the sample did not engage in bullying nor did they report being victimized, although the number of students reporting victimization is slightly higher.
Table 1

The Number of Participants who Report the Occurrence of Bullying and Victimization as Revealed in the Bully Composite and the Victim Composite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never (N=47)</th>
<th>Once in a while (N=47)</th>
<th>Pretty Often (N=47)</th>
<th>Very Often (N=47)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>32.14 (68%)</td>
<td>11.28 (24%)</td>
<td>2.42 (5.14%)</td>
<td>1.14 (2.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 47)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>18.17 (38.65%)</td>
<td>19 (40.42%)</td>
<td>6.7 (14.25)</td>
<td>3 (6.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 47)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of the bully composite consists of the sum of the reported bullying behavior
**The number of the victim composite consists of the sum of the reported victimization behavior

These results are supported by the data in Table 2 which reveals the mean level of bullying and victimization on a scale of 1 – 4, the value of 4 means that students report high levels of the behavior in question. The means reflect a composite score made up of the responses to several scales. The mean of the bully composite was 1.42 (SD .36). This means that students very rarely reported engaging in bullying behavior such as, physical bullying, verbal bullying and social bullying. In addition, the mean of the victim composite score was 1.88 (SD .62). This means that students very rarely reported being victimized. These results clearly indicate that students do not report bullying or victimization. These results could have arisen for two reasons; it is either there is a
problem with the questionnaire, or the students were scared to be caught as bullies, or afraid to be picked on as victims.

Table 2

*The Mean Level of Reporting Engaging in Bullying and Victimization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean*</td>
<td>1.42 (SD .36)</td>
<td>1.88 (SD .61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1.05 – 1.8</td>
<td>1.26 – 2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean for the bully composite consists of the average scores of all the 7 bully scales. The mean for the victim composite consists of the average scores of all the 6 victim scales (refer to Appendix B)*

Due to the fact that the number of students who reported frequent bullying is very small (2.42% = 1.14), and the number of students who reported being victimized is also very small (6.4% = 3), students could not be categorized into two groups: bullies and victims, and therefore no further inferential tests could be performed to test the first research question which was “Do students in grades six, seven and eight report engaging in bullying and do they report being victimized?”

*The Number of Students who Feel Safe in their School Environment*

When we assessed how many students felt safe, 34% strongly agreed that their school is safe, and 47.9% simply stated that they agreed with the statement. Combining these two groups, 89% of students reported feeling safe at school.

Table 3 depicts the mean level of perceiving the school as a safe environment. When we look at how safe they feel on a scale of 1-4, the mean safety score is 2.5
(SD, 0.32), which reveals that most students felt safe at school. These results suggest that the majority of the students feel safe at school and that bullying does not make them feel unsafe.

Table 3

The Mean Level of Perceiving the School as a Safe Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of School Environment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean*</td>
<td>2.5 (SD .32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>2 – 3.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean for perceptions consists of the average score of all 4 perceptions of the school environment scales (refer to Appendix C)

The Number of Students who Report Satisfaction with Prevention/Intervention Efforts in their School

When we assessed how many students felt that they needed more prevention/intervention, 19.1% reported that they strongly believe that there should be more prevention/intervention, and 26.6% reported that they need more prevention/intervention actions on the parts of the adults at their school. Turning to students’ ratings of how much the school should be doing in terms of bullying prevention/intervention, on a scale of 1 – 4 they scored 2.5 (refer to Table 5), which means that they reported that the adults at the school should be preventing and intervening more.
Table 5

The Mean Level of the Perceptions of Prevention/Intervention Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Prevention/Intervention</th>
<th>2.5 (SD .52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1.25 – 3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean for perceptions of prevention/intervention consists of the average scores all 4 perceptions of the prevention/intervention scales (refer to Appendix D)

Looking at the patterns of the findings from the number of bullies, the numbers of victims, and the finding of the safety issue, a curious pattern of results emerges; students did not report being bullies, nor experienced victimization, and they felt safe at their school, yet they required more prevention/intervention strategies at their school, which will be discussed later.

Safety, Grade Level and Gender

A MANOVA was conducted to assess whether all the composites reported above varied as a function of gender or grade level. Looking first at Grade, the MANOVA revealed a main effect for grade, $F(8,84) = 2.00, p < .05$. Results of the univariate test clearly show that this effect is arising from one composition, the Safety Composite, $F(2,44) = 3.52, p < .05$. A look at the means suggests that grade six students feel safer than both, grades seven or grade eight students (see Table 6).
Table 6

*The Mean Levels of all the four Composites as a Function of Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Bully</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Perception of School Environment</th>
<th>Perception of Prevention / Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second MANOVA was conducted to examine whether boys and girls differed on the four composites, however no overall gender effects was observed, $F(2,46) = 1.18, p = .33$, which suggests that boys and girls scored similarly on all four composites (see Table 7).

Table 7

*The Mean Levels of all four Composites as a Function of Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Bully</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Perception of School Environment</th>
<th>Perception of Prevention / Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Number of Students Getting Good Marks*

When we assessed the number of students getting good marks in school, 32% reported getting good marks very often, and 48.9% reported getting good marks pretty
often. These results suggest that more than 80% of the students are doing pretty well academically. Since a group of bullies could not be extracted from the data set, the question regarding the relationship between bullying and reported grades could not be assessed.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to shed the light on the bullying problem in the school, and therefore give insight to the school administrators and counselors to develop a bullying prevention/intervention program. The results of our findings will be discussed in this chapter presenting the amount of bullying and victimization occurring at the school, the perception of safety, the need for more prevention/intervention and the reported academic achievement.

Bullies

Based on the results we got from the questionnaire, the numbers we gathered revealed that there were no reported bullies in the school. Although the questionnaire was anonymous, however, students were aware that the questionnaire was prepared by a teacher at the school, which leads us to an assumption that their answers have been affected by this fact, and therefore did not identify themselves as bullies, fearing to get caught.

The definition of the word bullying for the students does not match our operational definition which is identified as a conscious and willful act of aggression and/or manipulation and it is usually directed towards one victim or occurs serially and/or randomly. Sullivan (2000) suggested that it is premeditated or opportunistic and it could last for a short period of time or go on for years (Sullivan, 2000). The information that supports the idea that students’ definition and our definition do not match was clearly stated in some questionnaires where students, when asked if they bully each other, they
wrote comments such as: “yes, but it’s just for fun”, “we are friends, we just do it as a joke”. Therefore, it is clear that students do not perceive their “jokes” as bullying, and that could be an additional reason why we did not have any reported bullying behavior.

The instrument used was targeting all three types of bullying that were identified to the students at the beginning of the questionnaire; physical bullying, verbal bullying and social bullying, where physical bullying included hitting, biting, punching, taking possessions and vandalizing properties, verbal bullying included calling names, making fun of others, and threatening, and social bullying included excluding a person from a group (Lee, 2005). Although the three types were clearly stated to the students, still the students did not label themselves as any of the types of bully.

Victims

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the numbers we gathered revealed that there were no reported victims in the school, although the number of victims was slightly higher than the number of bullies, however, we could not consider this as a significant number of a group of victims. For the same reasons stated above; the fact that the students knew that the questionnaire was prepared by a teacher at the school, they might have hesitated to label themselves as victims, fearing to be approached later by adults, or be picked up on by bullies in the school.

In addition, some students’ comments on the victim question items revealed that some victimization was taking place, but the students were viewing these incidents as jokes and friendly teasing. They reported statements such as “for fun”, “not in a mean way”.
By looking more in depth into the results, and if we added the standard deviation to the number of victims, we could project an idea that shows us a significant number of students being victimized, yet, we need to remember that standard deviation could also be subtracted, and this number would then lose its value. However, as a member of the school community, the existence of such standard deviation should give us material to think about since it is possible that the number of students victimized is higher than what was reported by the questionnaire.

In addition, this group of students received a bullying training in the elementary school as part of Character Building which is based on values program. The fact that they did get training on how to act towards bullying, minimizes the victimization behaviors. This is congruent with the literature which states that the students who are able to defend themselves against bullying could not be considered as victims of bullying (Freedman, 2002).

School Environment

Based on the results we gathered, the vast majority of the students reported that they feel safe at the school and that they have a sense of belonging to their community. These findings are in congruence with the previous results about bullies and victims. Since there were no reports of bullying and victimization, it is expected that students report feeling safe at their school.

In addition, the sense of belonging helps explain the fact that students feel safe at their school. Hypothetically, this sense of belonging to a community could be the key to resolve a lot of bullying issues at the school. The results show evidence that students feel connected to one another and to the members of their community, which could be helping
in minimizing bullying behavior. Metaphorically, this community could be viewed as a big family where siblings argue and get into fights, yet at the end of the day, they all find a way to resolve their issues and no permanent damage or harm is done to the members involved in bullying incidents. These results are in congruence with the literature that stated that students who are neither victims nor bullies felt connected to their school and viewed their school as a safe environment where they could depend on adults (Eisenberg, 2003).

Moreover, the school fosters high academic expectations as mention in the students' manual Page 10 (see Appendix E). This could justify according to Sullivan (2000), the lack of major bullying incidents, since students are more successful in their studies, and are more pro-social in their attitudes and behavior (Sullivan, 2000). An analysis of the results revealed that 47.8% of the school population feel very safe and have a sense of belonging.

However, due to the lack of adequate sample size for a thorough analysis of the school environment criterion, the analyses of the results are incomplete and can lend themselves to be misinterpreted. This group of students requires further attention and analysis to confirm the available results.

Prevention/Intervention

Although there were no reports of bullying, and no reports of victimization, and the students reported feeling safe at the school, however, a strange discrepancy appeared when the students reported their perceptions about prevention/intervention actions at their school. A significant number of the students reported that they are not satisfied by the prevention/intervention program at their school. Almost half the population that
participated in the questionnaire reported a need for more prevention/intervention on the part of the adults at their school. It could be that the students’ understanding of the word “safe” as mentioned in the questionnaire, is different from the meaning it was intended. Students might think that if they are not safe, it means that they are in danger. As a member of the community, I do not see physical bullying happening at the school, which could be considered as “unsafe” to the students, therefore, students feel safe from physical harassment, but not necessary from verbal or social bullying. A note that is worth mentioning is that this study was done in Lebanon, which is a country passing through political instability, where the country has been passing through a threatening situation for the past four years. Students may have mentioned feeling safe at school as opposed to feeling in danger or threatened by an explosion outside school.

In addition, the need for more prevention/intervention as reported by a number of students in the questionnaires could be in direct relation with the need of the age group targeted in the study. Research tells us that 12 to 13 year-old-students are at a most vulnerable time in their growth to be affected by disrupted self-concept and self-esteem (Cantin & Boivin, 2004). Since this population of students has the particularity of going through many emotional, physical and social changes, their need for more security could be justified by their reported need for more prevention/intervention strategies at their school.

Safety and Grade Level

Results from the MANOVA suggested that grade six students felt safer at school than grades seven and eight. This might have arisen from the fact that grade six students are in a transition phase from the elementary school, grade five, to the middle school
which starts in grade six. The fact that these students are in a transition phase, teachers and the counselor make sure that these students are supported and all levels; academically, socially and emotionally until they adjust to the new environment in grade seven, as stated in the school’s Students’ Handbook: “The Middle School strives to provide a nurturing environment so that students may enjoy a successful transition between Elementary and High School during this tumultuous time in their development.”

Page 5. This constant support on the part of teachers and the counselor might have contributed to a feeling of safety among grade six students. Students move from being dependent on teachers, in grade six, to being independent by grade eight.

*Academic Achievement*

Based on the data collected, more than 80% of the participants reported getting good marks at school. Referring to results we got earlier regarding belongingness to the school, in which 81% of the participants reported that they feel safe and connected to their school, we could shed the light on the fact that when students feel connected to their school, they tend to do better academically. In fact, these results are compatible with the review of literature that stated that students who felt more connected to their school got higher grades at school (Eisenberg 2003).

However, the question about academic achievement in the questionnaire was not a question that could really differentiate between students academically. The question said: “I get good marks in class”, and there were four options, “a. Very often, b. Pretty often, c. Once in a while, d. Never”. A suggestion for further research would be to phrase the sentence differently asking participants whether they consider themselves: A students, B students, C students, and D students.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter is about highlighting the validity of the instrument used to assess bullying, victimization, students' perceptions of their school environment, and their perceptions of the prevention/intervention strategies at their school, and it will provide recommendations for further studies about the topic.

The Adapted Peer Relations Questionnaire

The Peer Relations Questionnaire was originally designed by Ken Rigby and Philip Slee who have done a seminal work about bullying and bullying prevention. It is a short 20-item questionnaire developed in 1993 and assesses the occurrence of different forms of bullying in schools. The questionnaire has been used for research projects around the world. However, this instrument did not help me identify bullies, victims and it did not give clear cut results regarding the safety issue and the prevention/intervention strategies in the school. The problem could lie not in the questionnaire itself, but in the fact that a questionnaire was used to shed the light on this delicate issue. Such a topic should not have been assessed by a quantitative research, but rather a qualitative one since it needs more input on the part of students, teachers, administrators and counselors.

Recommendations and Follow up

Interview

For further research projects on the topic, it is suggested to use qualitative methods to collect data. One option of qualitative research is to conduct interviews with students through which students are asked open-ended question so that they could
elaborate on the issue of bullying. By interviewing students, the interviewer could ask relevant questions and get details from the interviewee in case of ambiguity. In addition, interviews with school administrators, counselors and teachers could be of great value, since members of the school faculty know their students better, and could give us insights on specific issues regarding bullying and victimization.

*Observation*

Another way to do a qualitative research is through observation. Observations during recess and lunch break could be done, as well as classroom observations. By observing students, the researcher could record students' behavior in details and the frequency of the identified behavior. The researcher could then identify bullies, victims, bully/victims and bystanders, which could be also resourceful information for preparing interviews and selecting participants.

*Simulation*

The researcher could create a situation and ask participants to act out or simulate certain role play and observe participants reactions to such situations. The researcher observes and records what goes on. The simulation could happen with one participant or with a group of participants, it is very critical for the observer to pay attention on how the members of the group interact. One thing that should be kept in mind is that the simulation act is artificial, and participants may not act during role play as they may act in real life situations. However, simulations could help building a hypothesis, and could be validated or not by comparing it with the interviews and observations.
Cyberbullying

With the increased use of technology, cyber bullying becomes something that we could not overlook. Middle school students are exposed to a lot of technology; computers and cellular phones, at schools and at home. We should not ignore the fact that cyberbullying might be increasing rapidly, therefore it is highly recommended to assess cyber bullying in further research.

Conclusion

This chapter presented follow-ups for future research, the recommendations that were made, are suggestions based on the challenges I faced during the research, and that I think could bring more focus to the research, and could validate the results. For further research, it is highly recommended to recruit a random and a bigger sample of participants. In addition, a comparison between a private school and a public school could be of a great value when assessing bullying.
References


http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_JOR.html

http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_LBN.html

http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_OMN.html

http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ARE.html


Appendix A

Questionnaire for Students
May 12, 2009

Dear Middle School students,

The enclosed questionnaire is designed to obtain your views about "Bullying", and it will help us improve the school’s rules and regulations regarding this issue. Your suggestions will be considered in reviewing the school’s rules and regulations.

We will greatly appreciate it if you will complete the questionnaire anonymously and return it to your teachers. Your responses will be kept completely confidential; we ask for no identifying information on the questionnaire form.

We want to thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Oulaya Samhoun-Jawad
Types of bullying:

**Physical bullying**, e.g. hitting, biting, punching, hair pulling, taking possessions, vandalizing properties etc…

**Verbal bullying** includes calling names, making fun of others, threatening, cyber bullying etc…

**Social bullying** such as excluding a person from a group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Circle one of the answers underneath each statement**

1. **How often have you been bullied during the last month?**
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

2. **How often have you bullied someone else during last month?**
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week
3. As an effect of bullying, have you ever felt
   a. Physically hurt or injured
   b. Emotionally hurt or upset
   c. Scared for your safety
   d. Other (Please specify) ______________

4. I feel safe at school
   a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree

5. I feel like I belong at this school
   a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree

6. Do you think the adults at your school are doing enough to prevent bullying?
   a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree

7. I get good marks in class
   a. Very often   b. Pretty often   c. Once in a while   d. Never

8. I get called names by others
   a. Very often   b. Pretty often   c. Once in a while   d. Never

9. I give weak kids a hard time
   a. Very often   b. Pretty often   c. Once in a while   d. Never

10. I feel I can NOT trust others
    a. Very often   b. Pretty often   c. Once in a while   d. Never

11. I get picked on by others
    a. Very often   b. Pretty often   c. Once in a while   d. Never
12. I am part of a group that goes around teasing others
   a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never

13. I like to intimidate others
   a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never

14. Others leave me out of things on purpose
   a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never

15. 1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

15. I get into fights at school
   a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never

16. 1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

17. I like to show others that I am the boss
   a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never
18. I enjoy upsetting weak kids
   a. Very often     b. Pretty often    c. Once in a while    d. Never

18.1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

19. I like to get into a fight with someone I can easily beat
   a. Very often     b. Pretty often    c. Once in a while    d. Never

19.1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

20. Others make fun of me
   a. Very often     b. Pretty often    c. Once in a while    d. Never

20.1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week
21. I get hit and pushed around by others
a. Very often  b. Pretty often  c. Once in a while  d. Never

21.1. How many times has this happened in the past month?
   a. Not at all
   b. Once a month
   c. 2-3 times during the month
   d. Once a week
   e. Several times a week

22. Do you think there is enough adult supervision in your school that helps in preventing bullying?
   a. Strongly agree  b. Agree  c. Disagree  d. Strongly disagree

23. How many times are you absent from school during a month?
   a. Never
   b. Once a month
   c. 2 times a month
   d. 3 times a month
   e. More than 3 times a month

24. Do you think more adult supervision at break and during lunch times would help prevent bullying?
   a. Strongly agree  b. Agree  c. Disagree  d. Strongly disagree

25. When I see bullying happen I hesitate to tell a teacher
   a. Strongly agree  b. Agree  c. Disagree  d. Strongly disagree
Interpretation

Items belonging to the scales are:

**Bully Scale:** 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19,

**Victim Scale:** 9, 11, 12, 15, 20, 21

**Frequency of involvement in bullying as a bully Scale:** 2, 16.1, 18.1, 19.1

**Frequency of involvement in bullying as a victim Scale:** 1, 15.1, 20.1, 21.1,

**Perception of School Environment Scale:** 3, 4, 5, 24

**Perceptions of prevention Scale:** 7, 23, 25, 26

**Academic achievement Scale:** 8
Appendix B

Bully and Victim Scales
Questions 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 19 were scored as follows

a. Very often = 4
b. Pretty often = 3
c. Once in a while = 2
d. Never = 1

Questions 9, 11, 12, 15, 20 and 21 were scored as follows

a. Very often = 4
b. Pretty often = 3
c. Once in a while = 2
d. Never = 1
Appendix C

Perception of School Environment Scale
Questions 4 and 5 were scored as follows:

a. Strongly agree = 4
b. Agree = 3
c. Disagree = 2
d. Strongly disagree = 1

Question 24 was scored as follows:

a. Never = 1
b. Once a month = 2
c. 2 times a month = 3
d. 3 times a month = 4
e. More than 3 times a month = 5
Appendix D

Perception of Prevention/Intervention Scales
Questions 7, 23, 25 and 26 were scored as follows:

a. Strongly agree = 4
b. Agree = 3
c. Disagree = 2
d. Strongly disagree = 1
Appendix E

The School’s Academic Expectations
One of the school's purposes is to prepare students to enter quality universities. As a result, the program is both demanding and balanced, accommodating those who seek an American college preparatory diploma, an International Baccalaureate Diploma and/or The Lebanese Baccalaureate... The school aims to have the students become life-long learners. It is essential that students are prepared to write and think critically and independently... We are dedicated to provide our students with high standards of academic instruction and performance, opportunities for service to others, and a well rounded program of activities directed toward the development of their skills, talents, and self confidence.