Group Processes in School Bullying and Prevention and Intervention

Jianghao Cai

College of International Business Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing 312030, China.

Abstract: In recent years, incidents of school bullying have been on the rise, attracting increasing attention from society. School bullying refers to the repeated and sustained use of force or coercion by individual or group of students to oppress other students in terms of power or status, resulting in many physical and psychological problems for the victims. This paper introduces the definition, classification, role types, and the impact on victims, as well as interventions for school bullying. Studies have shown that school bullying can have negative psychological consequences for victims, such as anxiety and depression, making timely intervention extremely important. Intervention measures include educating the active perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. In particular, the "STAC" course is an effective way to educate bystanders. In summary, school bullying is a problem that requires timely intervention, and it requires joint efforts from schools, families, and society to solve.

Keywords: Students; School Bullying; Intervention

1. Overview of School Bullying

Currently, there is no clear and unified concept of "school bullying" in the academic community. According to the definition of school bullying defined by Norwegian professor Olweus (1978), it generally needs to meet three criteria: (1) intention to harm; (2) repetition and long-term duration; and (3) unequal power relations. Based on these three criteria, the definition of school bullying used in this article is: "When a student is repeatedly and persistently subjected to negative behavior from other students, either individually or in a group, it is considered as school bullying."

Professor William Smith categorized bullying into five types in the first edition (2008) of "The bully in the mirror". He then further subdivided them in the third edition (2019) by adding two types: gender bullying and racial and cultural bullying. This article uses the classification of the third edition (2019), which includes physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, psychological bullying, cyberbullying, gender bullying, and racial and cultural bullying.

As of today, school bullying remains a common problem worldwide, although there has been a decreasing trend with the advancement of time and improvement of laws and regulations, school bullying still occurs widely in various countries. The definition of school bullying is still difficult to define, and it is often mistaken as normal games or play between students, making it difficult to solve the problem in a timely and effective manner. School bullying not only causes psychological or physical harm to the victims but can also escalate to become a criminal offense and encourage the occurrence of other bullying behaviors.

According to relevant research, the impact of school bullying on victims is diverse. Adolescents who are bullied in schools are more likely to experience psychological and physical problems, such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, social difficulties, and learning difficulties. In severe cases, victims may exhibit self-harm or suicidal behavior. Victims who suffer from long-term bullying may develop various psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety, autism, post-traumatic stress disorder, and antisocial personality disorder, as well as various physical illnesses such as headaches, muscle tension, and stomach pains. These consequences can have a lifelong impact on the victims' health and quality of life. Therefore, intervening in school bullying behavior can not only help bullies realize the errors in their behavior and correct them in a timely manner but also prevent or reduce harm to victims and increase their self-confidence. For schools and society, intervening in school bullying can improve school safety and students' learning efficiency, enhance social cohesion, and promote the harmonious development of schools and society.

2. The roles of school bullying

In the context of school bullying, three different roles are usually involved: the victim, the bully, and the bystander. Taiwanese scholar Fu-Yuan Weng (2013) divided the roles in school bullying into six categories: Bully, Accomplice, Bully-victim, Victim, Disengaged onlooker, and Active onlooker. American psychologists Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer (2010) classified the roles into six categories as well: Aggressor, Assistant, Supporter, Victim, Witness, and Disengaged Bystander. Based on the research results of both Western and Taiwanese scholars, this paper divides the roles in school bullying into five categories: Bully, Assistant, Victim, Disengaged onlooker, and Active onlooker. By intervening with neutral bystanders, they can be transformed into active bystanders who can effectively intervene in school bullying.

(1) Bully

Bully refers to a student who consciously bullies or attacks others, possibly using physical, verbal, or digital violence. They play a leading role throughout the bullying behavior and sometimes even direct and control the behavior of accomplice aggressors.

Bullies can be classified into two types based on the form of bullying: emotional bullies and behavioral bullies. Emotional bullies typically use non-physical methods to attack their victims, such as spreading rumors, ignoring or excluding them. Behavioral bullies are usually physically strong and powerful and can benefit directly from physically aggressive behavior, so they mainly use physical methods to attack, such as shoving, hitting, and taking possessions by force.

(2) Assistant

Assistant refers to the students who provide support, assistance, encouragement, or acquiescence to the bully. They may not directly participate in bullying, but they play a role in fueling the bullying behavior behind the scenes.

(3) Victim

Victim refers to the students who are bullied or attacked, and they may suffer from physical, verbal or digital violence, experiencing sustained harm and oppression.

Victims are often physically weaker and lower in status, exhibiting characteristics such as introversion, loneliness, social deficits, vulnerability to harm and fright, lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, frequently attempting to escape bullying, and feeling helpless and powerless.

(4) Disengaged onlooker

Disengaged onlooker refers to students who are not involved in bullying incidents. They may not be aware of the severity of the event, or they may feel they have no ability or responsibility to intervene. Their proportion in the bullying behavior is much larger than that of the active aggressors and victims, and their attitudes and reactions can greatly affect the occurrence of bullying.

(5) Active onlooker

Active onlooker refers to the person who witnesses bullying incidents and takes proactive actions to intervene, prevent or report the bullying to relevant authorities. Active onlookers usually consist of teachers, parents, and a small group of students. They can effectively reduce the duration and frequency of bullying behavior and play a critical role in the prevention of bullying.

3. Intervention for School Bullying
3.1 Interventions for Bullies

In school bullying, people often focus more on the victims and hate the bullies, believing that bullies have a dominant position while victims have a weaker position. However, both bullies and victims are actually in a weak position, and therefore intervention on the bullies is equally important. Bullies are the initiators of bullying behavior, so direct intervention on bullies is the most effective way to address school bullying. In recent years, schools have continuously strengthened their prevention programs against school bullying, targeting primarily the active bullies who generally lack empathy and moral responsibility. Therefore, schools should focus on moral education and social skills training that cater to their characteristics, such as offering lectures covering topics such as what school bullying is, the impact of school bullying on victims, and how to avoid school bullying. Schools should also provide timely and professional psychological counseling to the bullies, helping them better understand their emotional needs and use other means besides bullying to deal with their emotions. Secondly, schools can also adopt punishment measures such as suspension, fines, and disciplinary actions on the active bullies, letting them realize that bullying behavior is unacceptable.

3.2 Interventions for Victim

In school bullying, people often pay more attention to the victims and hate the bullies, believing that the bullies are in a position of power and the victims are in a position of weakness. However, both the bullies and the victims are in a position of weakness, and therefore, intervention with the bullies is also particularly important. The bullies are the initiators of bullying behavior, and direct intervention with them is the most effective way to address school bullying. In recent years, schools have continuously strengthened prevention programs for school bullying, primarily targeting the proactive bullies who generally lack empathy and a sense of moral responsibility. Schools need to focus on their characteristics and strengthen moral education and social skills training in their programs, such as lectures covering what school bullying is, the impact of school bullying on victims, and how to avoid school bullying. Schools also need to provide timely psychological counseling to bullies, allowing them to better understand their emotional needs and use other means besides bullying to cope with their emotions.

Victims are often the most affected by bullying behavior, and these behaviors can have a lasting impact on their future lives. Therefore, intervention with victims requires long-term attention and support, allowing them to gradually regain their confidence and self-esteem. Schools play a crucial role in intervening with victims. Firstly, schools can provide victims with timely psychological counseling services to reduce their psychological burden and make them feel that they are being cared for. Secondly, schools should offer courses on how to deal with bullying behavior and how to protect themselves when being bullied, helping victims learn how to cope with school bullying. Finally, schools should encourage victims to seek help from teachers, family members, and classmates, and let them know that seeking help will not lead to retaliation from the bullies.

3.3 Interventions for bystanders

In recent years, research on intervening in school bullying from the perspective of bystanders has gradually gained attention from scholars. Bystanders are individuals who witness bullying but do not participate in it, and their group is much larger and more likely to successfully intervene in bullying behavior. Research has found that if bystanders speak up for the victim, it can effectively reduce 50% of bullying incidents (Smith & Brain, 2006). Currently, the mainstream intervention approach is the "STAC" program developed by Midgett (2015) and other scholars. This program aims to train bystanders to become protectors of the victim through four projects: "Stealing the show", "Turning it over", "Accompany others", and "Coaching compassion". Through group discussions, role-playing, speeches, games, and other activities conducted through the "STAC" program, bystanders can become aware of the roles they play and the responsibilities they bear in school bullying incidents, and can effectively stop bullying behavior from happening. The "STAC" program can also teach bystanders specific intervention skills and strategies, encourage them to take positive intervention actions in safe situations, and report bullying behavior to relevant management personnel such as teachers and schools at the first time, in order to help the victim receive timely support and assistance.

4. Conclusion

Research on school bullying and intervention in China is still relatively behind, and serious incidents of school bullying frequently occur. This article provides a brief overview of the definition and types of school bullying, elaborates on the negative effects of school bullying on victims, analyzes the behavior and psychological characteristics of different roles in school bullying, and summarizes relevant intervention methods based on these role characteristics. The aim is to better address the longstanding issue of school bullying.

References

[1] Zhang XY, Xu W. A summary of the research on the behavior of bullying bystanders on campus. Monthly Journal of Psychology, Vol.17, No.07, PP.228-230, 233, 2022.

[2] Pan MG. A study on the intervention of middle school students' campus bullying. Master's thesis of Xiamen University, 2019.

[3] Wu YW, Miao SJ. The group process of campus bullying and its prevention and intervention. Chinese School Health, Vol.38, No.04, PP.629-633, 2017.

[4] Weng FY. A study on the classification of campus bullying roles and its intervention strategies. Advances in Psychological Science, Vol.21, No.5, PP.838-847,2013.

[5] Gini, G., & Pozzoli, T. (2013). Bullied children and psychosomatic problems: A meta-analysis. Pediatrics, Vol.132, No.4, PP.720-729.

[6] Wang, J., Nansel, T. R., & Iannotti, R. J. (2011). Cyber and traditional bullying: Differential association with depression. Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol.48, No.4, PP.415-417.

[7] Wang, J., Nansel, T. R., & Iannotti, R. J. (2013). Cyber and traditional bullying: Differential risk factors and outcomes. Journal of School Psychology, Vol.51, No.1, PP.17-33.

[8] Wong, D. S. W., & Chan, H. C. O. (2017). A social-ecological exploration of bystander behaviors in school bullying: Understanding the impact of individual and peer-group factors. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol.32, No.10, PP.1528-1551.

[9] Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., O'Brennan, L. M., & Gulemetova, M. (2019). Teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives on bullying and prevention: Findings from a national education association study. School Psychology Review, Vol.48, No.2, PP.126-145.