Bullying: Teachers’ and Education Professionals’ Knowledge and Needs

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I. Introduction

Bullying persists as a problem in our schools, and it affects a large number of students every year. An estimated 25.8% of students were impacted in the state of Idaho, as reported by The Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2017. In addition, the large number of instances of bullying cases happen unknowingly to school faculty and workers. That lack of knowledge of the situation permits the bullying to continue, bypassing the effects these attitudes can cause to the students involved (Cañizares de Segredo, Khan, Luzardo, Nasij, & Zamalvive, 2004).

Many students believe that situations involving aggression are problems in which they would not normally ask for help from teachers; however, they affirm that they would ask for help from teachers that they trust (Diaz-Aguado, 2006).

Several studies reported that teachers have little confidence in themselves to intervene in abusive situations (Álvarez-García, Rodríguez, González-Castro, Núñez, & Álvarez, 2010).

“The strength of people’s convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations” (Bandura, 1977:195).

II. Methods

2.1 Context

This research was performed at the Bullying 101 One-Day Institute that was held at Boise State University by the Idaho Positive Behavior Network (IPBN).

2.2 Timeline

The data collection was carried out in two different sessions of this Bullying 101 One-Day Institute (November 9th 2018 and February 7th, 2019).

2.3 Sample size

A total of 53 teachers and education professionals in several elementary and middle schools in Boise participated over two days (17 in the first session and 36 in the second).

2.4 Research Design and Measures

Participants participated in the activity: “Regarding bullying prevention...What do you know? What do you want to know? What are you excited about? What are your fears/reservations?”

Participants were divided into groups to perform focus group activities (5 groups on the first session and 11 groups on the second session). Each group was given a large poster in which to answer the mentioned questions after discussing them as a group.

This study performed qualitative analysis of those 16 posters categorizing the emerging themes.

The themes were coded in the following manner: K themes for the KNOW question, W themes for WANT TO KNOW question, E themes for EXCITED ABOUT question and F themes for FEARS question. The following figure is divided into thematic quadrants with the frequency of each sub-category in parenthesis:

III. Results

The resultant categories (according to the frequency of the comments in each category) were the following:

KNOW:

K1- Teach proactive behaviors
K2- Positive school culture and relationships are a key factor
K3- Difficulty in defining and identifying bullying
K7- Bystanders for preventing the bullying

EXCITED ABOUT:

E1- Training to learn strategies and resources
E2- Seeing a change in school culture
E3- Already started to work on it
E5- Share the learned information

WANT TO KNOW:

W1- What is “bullying”?
W3- Steps and techniques to change behaviors
W4- Appropriate programs and resources
W7- How to educate in order to understand bullying

FEARS:

F1- Lack of self-confidence in making a difference
F2- Teacher buy-in/no commitment
F7- Worsening the situation
F10- Cyberbullying

IV. Conclusions

There are concerns expressed by teachers about the proliferation of bullying and cyberbullying cases. They are aware of some information about bullying, even if some teachers express confusion or ambiguity about its persistence and prevention.

The most relevant finding of this study is that school professionals express the need for training and appropriate resources they trust. If provided training and resources, they can dismiss their expressed lack of confidence when acting and reacting against bullying and cyberbullying situations.

These conclusions are consistent with many ideas expressed in recent bullying literature (Brashaw et al., 2013; Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemes, 2013; Lester, Waters; Pearce; Spears & Falconer, 2018) that found that teachers lack confidence in handling bullying and cyberbullying situations and expressed the desire to receive more training.

Forthcoming research will identify the critical competencies for training teachers with the aim to encourage their likelihood of intervention in bullying or cyberbullying situations.