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What is bullying and how should it be approached in school? A case study of teachers' and pupils' perceptions in a typical primary school.

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Contents

Abstract

Bullying within a primary school is a concept that can have detrimental effects that last throughout an individual's life (Wolke and Lereya 2015.) An aspect of bullying where there is disagreement is on how to define it effectively (Espelage 2018.) This research project aims to delve deeper into this lack of cohesion and come up with a definition that combines the ideas of both children and teachers as well as uncover if there is an effective approach when preventing bullying. A case study approach was used to investigate how bullying was dealt with in an urban school in the West Midlands. The research findings suggest that more needs to be done to support teachers in order for them to have the tools to appropriately combat instances of bullying. There is also an emphasis on a need for further parental involvement when situations of bullying arise.

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What is bullying and how should it be approached in school. A case study of teachers' and pupils' perceptions in a typical primary school.

This research project aims to discuss and answer two key research questions:

1. What is bullying?

2. How should it be approached in schools?

By analysing responses from a variety of children across the key stages, as well as teachers, I hope to identify any correlations between differing opinions and perceptions. I also hope to discover if the methods with in which bullying is dealt with are effective or if there is room

to develop the current procedures followed. The decision to explore this aspect of education stems from discussions and experiences of other students as well as from my own teaching practice. I found that although bullying is a serious subject, (Menesini and Salivalli 2017), there were differing opinions with regards on what constitutes bullying, as well as the best way to deal with instances of it. Many of the largescale research projects focus on the personality traits of bullies and victims (O'Brien 2019), whereas I have chosen to delve deeper into the concept and how people react to it.

This research project takes the form of a case study in a primary school situated in the West Midlands. Data was collected through a mixed methods approach, utilising questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews. I carried out research in 12 focus groups, all completing semi-structured interviews. 6 staff members completed an online questionnaire, 3 of whom also completed an interview. This research project is broken down into three main themes: differing perceptions of what bullying entails, teacher confidence and capability upon dealing with instances of bullying and finally methods of intervention and their success. Each theme was explored using literature, findings and evaluations. In this research project the outcomes will hopefully discover a deeper understanding of how those in the primary school setting perceive bullying, and the methods in which it is approached. I hope that the results, in turn, help to inform future practice on methods that do and do not work with regards to the concept.

Literature Review

Definitions of bullying

One of the key aspects of this research project was to understand how different individuals define bullying. One of the main problems with conducting research regarding bullying is the

difficulty in defining it (Espelage 2018.) The Anti-Bullying Alliance (2023) define it as "the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online." This definition has developed recently to hold more emphasis on the mental aspects and effects of bullying, (Rivara and Le Menestrel 2016), as well as to acknowledge the rise of cyber bullying (Peebles 2014.) When looking at research into how this definition has developed, it is argued that due to an increase in children's access to the internet and social media, a change in perception has occurred. This could potentially be due to new forms of peer victimisation over the internet and this, in turn, alters what children view as behaviours that constitute as bullying (Hellstrom, Persson and Hagquist 2015.)

When looking closer into each part of the definition, there is much debate with regards to whether bullying needs to be repetitive to be called as such. Hellstrom, Persson and Hagquist (2015) researched into adolescents' definitions of bullying and concluded that the traditional criteria of repetition may not be as relevant in today's society as it has been previously. This demonstrates a clear shift in the definition of bullying when it is compared to older research into the concept. Olweus (1994) stated that bullying is clearly outlined by the child being exposed to discomfort repeatedly over time. This brings into question whether repetition is still a feature of the definition or whether society has moved away from believing bullying has a necessity to be repetitive. However, O'Brien (2019) states that each researcher has a slightly differing opinion with regards to what constitutes as bullying, and therefore hinders the ability to make judgements surrounding research due to the unreliability of the findings. This is demonstrated by a piece of research by Cuadrado-Gordillo (2011) where she undermines the idea that research is moving away from the

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necessity of repetition by making it a key factor in her definition. This has a strong argument with significant weight behind it due to the scope and size of its participant base. The researcher questioned 2300 children compared to Hellstrom, Persson and Hagquist (2015) who only interviewed 150.

Another aspect where there is a vast range of opinion when defining bullying is with regards to who can be bullied. Vaillancourt et al (2008) state that only those who cannot easily defend themselves are targets of bullying. This has been a theme throughout research, demonstrated by Peterson and Rigby (1999) when they describe bullying as inflicting an act of harm on someone "weaker than themselves" and that "it is not bullying when two people of the same strength have a fight or quarrel" (p.482.) However, there is another discrepancy with regard to whether these instances are correlated to transition. It can be argued that these instances of bullying are not called as such due to them being perceived as transitory, and that these situations disappear as the school year progresses (Quinn et al 2007, Vaillancourt et al 2023.)

Identity is an aspect of bullying research much investigated. Created by Sidanius and Pratto (1999), the 'social dominance theory of bullying' is the concept that a more dominant child will target someone less socially ingrained to be the victim in order to gain popularity, this is later supported by Pellegrini et al (2007) and more recently Hensums et al (2023.)

How bullying is approached

When looking at how bullying is approached, the Department for Education (2017) provided guidance titled "Preventing and tackling bullying" in 2017. This is an 18-page document giving teachers best practice examples with regards to instances of bullying. However, within this guidance there is no talk regarding the children who bully. This appears to be a common

theme throughout bullying research, where most focus is on how the victim is affected as opposed to uncovering why the child bullying is doing so (Rigby 2004, O'Brien 2019.) This piece of documentation has come under criticism due to the idea that every instance of bullying is different and there should be no set way of dealing with it (Maunder and Crafter 2018.) However, Rigby (2020) states that even with this documentation, intervention with severe cases of bulling is much less successful than their not as serious counterparts. Wang, Berry and Swearer (2013) state that no matter how a school approaches bullying, it will not be effective if the school climate is negative. The presence, or absence of strong positive teacher relationships has a large impact on whether bullying behaviour occurs. This is reinforced by Biernbaum and Lotyczewski (2015) who state that school climate, especially interpersonal relationship quality, has a direct link to bullying.

There is also argument on the effectiveness of policies regarding bullying due to a lack of student voice. Black et al (2010) state that although schools have adopted anti-bullying polices, they have little to no input from children who are affected by it. Lane, Black and Jones (2019) call into question the effectiveness of creating methods of prevention 'for' children instead of 'with' children due to teachers being out of touch and not having a deep enough understanding of what is actually experienced by the individuals. There is growing support for involving children with policy making due to the children's perspectives giving rich insight into their experiences (Palaiologou, 2014.) However, it can also be argued that by having a large amount of student voice, it affects the reliability of a study due to the constant need for critical reflection and analysis (Palaiologou 2013.) Powell et al (2012) state there is a disadvantage in using children in research. They state that researchers need to balance wanting to protect children from harm, whilst also ensuring that they benefit from the results.

It is the teacher's responsibility to tackle instances of bullying and the school become accountable on how well it is dealt with (DfE 2017.) However, a limitation to the effectiveness of these interventions is lack of awareness that these instances are even occurring. Children are apprehensive when reporting bullying due to the fear that teachers will either do too much, or not enough and make the situation worse (DeLara 2012.) Moore and Mclean (2012), state that children would rather do nothing at all than tell an adult. They found that 50% of children told an adult, but only 24% of those told were teachers. Allen (2014) states that children prefer to disclose to their friends rather than adults, calling into question the effectiveness of teachers input, if it is not being utilised. A possible reason for the children's lack of willingness to disclose instances of bullying to teachers could be due to the lack of success when it is shared. While teachers legally have to investigate and report instances of bullying, research suggests that the majority of the time they struggle to decide which incidents to report (Horton, Forsberg and Thornberg 2023.) There is also research to state that some teachers take instances of bullying more seriously than others (Segerholm and Hult 2020) and that there are varying degrees of investigation when teachers are told (Lindgren et al 2021.) This could be due to differing influences on teachers' perceptions. One of these is how serious a teacher views a situation (Green, 2021) and another is how they perceive the individual that is reporting the bullying (Mazzone et al 2021.) Horton, Forsberg and Thornberg (2023) found that teachers believed parents to be a key prohibitor for wanting to get involved with cases of bullying. Due to professional accountability, to avoid making judgements, teachers decided whether to report instances based on how involved parents were and therefore how likely they were to be held accountable for how a situation was dealt with. This suggests that children in needs of teacher involvement and support may not receive it due to conflicting demands on teachers (Novak 2019.)

There is also research to show that children are fearful of disclosing to their parents due to the worry that they will over-react (Moore and Maclean 2012.) However, this could be to over-compensate for a lack of trust between teacher and parent (Hale, Fox and Murray 2017.) Although there is a large gap in research with regards to parental perceptions of bullying, (Stives et all 2021), this is slowly increasing due to parental figures being able to give an alternative perspective to how a child is affected by bullying (Larranaga, Yubero and Navarro 2018.) Although this is a positive, there is judgement surrounding whether these perspectives are a true reflection on how a child feels (Siddiqui 2011.) If the individual being bullied does not feel comfortable enough to disclose instances of bullying to their parent, it calls into question the validity of their opinions due to not have a true perception on what is actually occurring within school (Hale, Fox and Murray 2017.)

The effect on the victim

One key aspect of bullying that there is a lot of research into, is the effects of it on the victim. This was surprising as the mental side of bullying is a fairly new concept with regards to what is perceived as bullying (Chang 2021.) However, it has serious effects on a child's mental health and wellbeing (Guo, Tan and Zhu 2022.) A child who is bullied can experience long – term damage to self-esteem (Reece 2008) and are at more risk to develop mental disorders (Kallmen and Hallgren 2021.) Subedi (2020) states that suicide is ranked as the third most common cause of death for children under 14, and that there is a strong link between bullying and suicide. This emphasises the need for effective intervention to help to prevent these situations from happening. However, it is not just the effect on the victim that should be considered, the bully should too (Armitage 2021.) Sigurdson et al (2015) argue that all groups involved in bullying suffered from negative mental health outcomes

compared to those who were not involved. They found that those being bullied showed symptoms of deteriorating mental health externally, where it was clear to teachers and parents. Whereas with the children who were the bullies, they tended to internalise symptoms of mental health problems and therefore teachers and parents could not highlight when the child was struggling. This calls into question reasons why a child may be bullying others and reinforces the idea that a climate where bullying is prevalent hinders the wellbeing of all children involved, whether they are participating or not (Nassem and Harris 2015.) Therefore, it may be beneficial for more work to be carried out to determine the most effective way to prohibit a bullying climate from being formed as well as how best to support the mental health of those involved.

Methodology

Research Approach

This research project considers attitudes and approaches to bullying in a primary school through a case study that relies on a mixed methods approach. Although there is no set definition of case study research, (Heale and Twycross 2018), it is widely seen as an opportunity to collect in depth data by investigating a group or community in their natural settings (Crowe et al 2011.) By viewing the participants in their real-life context, it allows for the researcher to develop detailed understandings, which works specifically well in an educational setting (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2012.)

Case studies are the most common method when dealing with social research (Priya 2020.) This could be due to them being a useful tool to conclude in-depth explanations of social

cues and attitudes, and also can be a robust research method when a wide range of data is required (Zainal 2007.) Although case studies can be seen as a hinderance due to their objective qualities, (Yin 2013), it is also limiting with regards to boundaries that can cut off possible variables (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017.) A case study approach was selected for this particular piece of research through a process of elimination. Choosing a research method which fits best is one of the most challenging decisions during a research project, (Opoku, Ahmed and Akotia 2016), and ensuring that the research method that is chosen meets the objectives of the study is paramount to its success (Teherani et al 2015.) Knowing this, a case study appeared to be the most appropriate with regards to the setting, and the research being conducted. By using a case study, it allows for direct links to personal opinion and experiences, (Ridder 2017), which is a key aspect to the basis of the project.

In order to have the opportunity to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the approaches to bulling and why they are used, the research utilised a mixed methods approach. By combining the use of both questionnaires as well as interviews it allows for a more holistic view on experiences by drawing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Shorten and Smith 2017.)

Data Collection

This research project retrieved data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Data on the children's opinions and experiences was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews in groups of 3 children to 1 researcher. In order to get a robust sample size, 6 children from each year group were interviewed, all of whom were randomly selected to avoid any bias (Taherdoost 2016.) 7 teachers completed an online questionnaire and, on the basis of their role in the school, 3 were chosen for an interview. When all data was

compiled, the data was analysed and coded. By looking in depth at the range of answers, it

allowed for key themes to be identified (Ryan and Bernard 2003, Bazeley 2009.) As these

themes arose it became apparent that due to the sheer amount of data, it was not

manageable (Fan, Han and Liu 2014.) Even through a quick scope of the interviews, it was

clear that there was a significant difference in attitudes across the years and ages, therefore

the data has been organised into 3 groups. The first is Reception and Key Stage 1 (KS1), the

second is lower Key Stage 2 (KS2) and the last is upper KS2. In terms of the teacher

questionnaires and interviews, they have been separated into the two methods in which the

data was received.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the most complex aspect of qualitative research (Thorne 2000, Sutton and

Austin 2015.) With the data collected, in order to better understand the results, the

researcher used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows for interpretations to be drawn

from raw data and, in turn, makes the findings more valuable (Castleberry and Nolen 2018.)

By assigning codes to data, and interpreting experiences it allows for patterns and themes to

emerge and meaning to be attached (Maguire and Delahunt 2017.) However, it can be

argued that coding can cause for new ideas and theories to be ignored (Heracleous and

Fernandes 2019.) This is because the researcher could hope to identify themes that already

exist instead of using the data to create new topics and theories (Nowell et al 2017.)

Limitations

The use of a case study hinders how generalisable the results are (Wikfeldt 2016.) By

utilising a small sample size, it brings into the question whether the results of the research

project are only applicable to the setting they were taken from and are therefore not

relevant to the rest of wider society (Tsang 2014.) However, the use of a small sample size is justified due to it being based off unavoidable research restraints, (Lakens 2022), as well as the data collected being of high quality (O'Leary 2021.) Another limitation of the research project is the issue of conformity. Due to the semi-structured interviews being done in groups, it could question the validity of the results due to them not being the participants' true opinion (Sun and Yu 2016.) When children are in a group answering opinion-based questions, they tend to adapt their own opinions to match the majority, (Einav 2014), therefore it is difficult to know if the answers given are the true beliefs.

Ethical considerations

In order to begin the data collection process of this research project, Ethical clearance was sought out from York St John University. The ethical guidelines present were followed throughout this project. It was ensured that participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point, even when data was no longer being collected (Kumar 2019.) Participants have been given numbers instead of names so that they remain anonymous throughout and the raw data destroyed upon completion (Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger 2015.)

Findings

The findings of this research present a mixed opinion when it comes to discussing the concept of bullying. When comparing answers from the children and the teaching staff, it appears that the perception of how bullying is dealt with differs greatly. There is also a change of opinion through key stages and therefore, after analysing data, 3 main themes emerged. These three main themes are: differing perceptions of what bullying entails, teacher confidence and capability with dealing with instances of bullying, and finally

methods of intervention and their success. This section of the paper will outline the findings and look deeper into the themes stated above.

Perceptions of Bullying.

The data collated during this study suggests that children's perceptions on what bullying is and what it entails develops as they get older. When the children were asked 'What is Bullying?' 75% of the reception and KS1 children defined it as 'being naughty' (Child R2) and believed children are targeted based on how they looked. This differs to the Upper KS2 children's perceptions were that it is a repetitive form of verbal, emotional and physical abuse. There is a clear increase in understanding of bullying at around year 2, which, after a discussion with the SENCO, coincides with a number of taught sessions surrounding bullying delivered to this year group. This would explain the change in definition; however, it could also be due to being more exposed to instances of bullying over social media. When asked how much access they had to social media, the percentage increased as the children got older, with 100% of upper KS2 children having a phone or tablet, compared to 50% of lower KS2 and only 20% of Reception and KS1. This questions whether an increase in bullying at the same time as an increase to access to technology is cause or just correlation.

When teaching staff were asked to give their own definition of bullying, there was a lot of emphasis on the act having intent behind it. One individual stated that bullying was "hurting someone with intent, physically or emotionally, online or face to face." When questioned about this during interview, the teacher stated that bullying has a lot of thought behind it, and that it is more malicious than that of "just being mean." This is reflected in the questionnaire when 5 out of 6 teachers stated strongly agree to the statement "Bullying is serious and should be treated as such.

Figure 1: Does bullying need to be repetitive to be called as such?
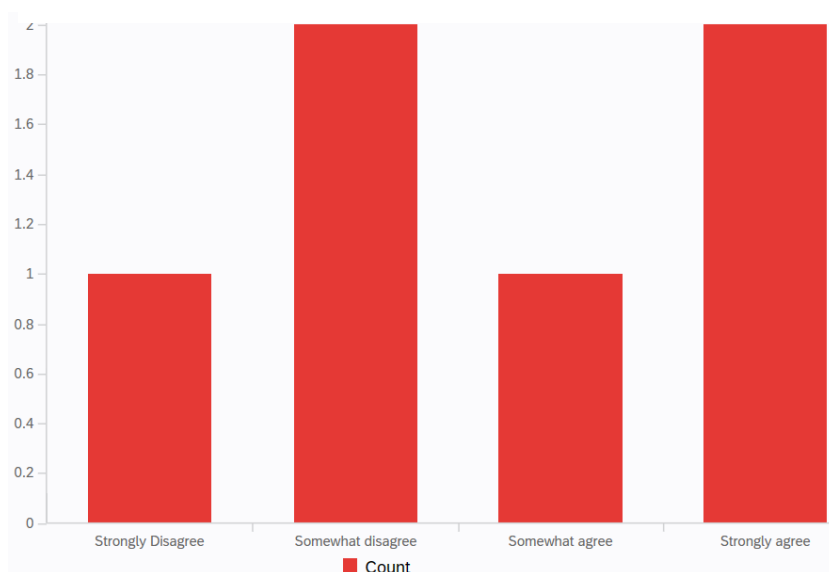
When the children were asked if bullying needed to be repetitive, 100% of children from year 3 upwards said yes. However, when staff were asked the same question only 30% of teachers believed bullying needed to be repetitive (Figure 1.) This was surprising as on the schools own bullying policy, repetition was a pivotal aspect of what they perceived to be bullying. However, when questioned on why they did not think bullying needed to be repetitive to be called as such, one staff member during interview stated that "there is a clear difference between a child being mean, and a child being a bully" this demonstrates that teachers use the severity of the incident, and their own teaching experience to gauge whether an instance constitutes as bullying as opposed to only labelling it if it is repetitive.

Teacher confidence and capability.

One theme that was most prevalent in the findings was that of teachers being the main person children disclose instances of bullying to. When asked the question "How should bullying be approached?", over 80% of children stated that you should "tell a teacher" and that they would figure out the best approach. However, there was a mix of opinion on

whether teachers dealing with it worked. The vast majority of children in reception and KS1 stated that they were happy with the result of teacher input, however this attitude changed further up the school. The children in lower KS2 found that not every teacher followed up reports and that it continues or worsens after teacher involvement. This opinion of it being ineffective was also reflected in upper KS2, when the children stated that they were not always believed, or it is not dealt with at all. One child in year 6 stated that "it is not dealt with when they are told, teachers tend to make assumptions or just dismiss the concern" (Child 6B). This shows a clear difference in how the children from different age ranges perceive teacher involvement and how they view teachers' capability with dealing with it. However, when looking further into these findings, this could be explained by the reception and KS1 children not experiencing as much bullying as their older counterparts. When asked the question "Is there a lot of bullying in school?" 12 times as many children in upper KS2 said yes than those in reception and KS1 (Figure 2.) This calls into question whether the results show a difference in opinion, or whether the reception and KS1 children have just not had much input from the teachers due to not needing it, and therefore cannot give an accurate perception on the effectiveness of using teachers as a way of combatting bullying.
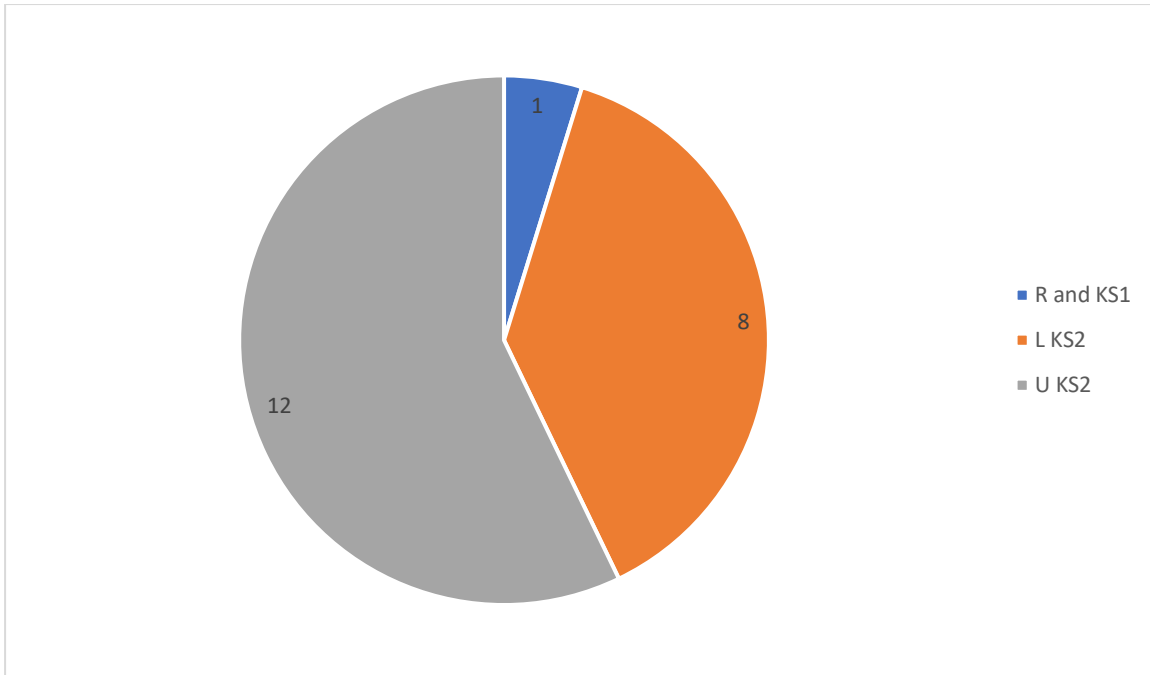
Figure 2: Children who said yes to the question "Is there a lot of bullying?"

Following on from the results of the children's interviews, more information was needed with regards to the teachers' opinions on dealing with bullying. Therefore, a question regarding their confidence was asked. 5/6 teachers answered that they "somewhat agreed" or "strongly agreed" to the statement "I am confident in my ability to deal with instances of bullying." However, in a separate question over half of the teachers stated that they wanted more training and knowledge on how to deal with bullying, with one individual going as far as saying that they wanted a set professional in school to help "as children are dealing with so much more than a school is currently equipped for." This calls into question whether teachers have the capability to effectively handle situations, or whether there needs to be more guidance to appropriately support teachers.

Methods of intervention and their success

As stated above, the most common method of intervention with regards to bullying is using the teacher as a resource. When asked what the methods of intervention were, many of the

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children stated that concerns were told to the teachers, and this was passed onto the head (EK) to reprimand and manage appropriately. This was a cohesive strategy that was reflected across the school, from both the students and the teachers. A child in year 3 stated that when sent to EK they "talk both sides and apologise" (Child 3D). This was a common answer when asked about what happens during these meetings, and that the use of explaining both sides of the argument helped to diffuse the situations effectively. This could suggest that using a member of senior leadership could be more effective than that of just the teacher.

Looking into whether methods of intervention were useful was a large portion of the questioning for both children and the teachers. A key question the teachers were asked was whether they felt the government give enough guidance on policy to bullying. 80% of teachers said no. The teachers felt that the guidance provided was hard to implement, unrealistic and had a lot of grey areas. They stated that there was a lack of information with regards to the mental side of bullying and the documentation did not give enough weight to the "many different ways children can be targeted" (teacher 2) and how to combat them. This could suggest that government guidance is not as effective as it could be, and that documentation could be more useful with more practical and inclusive scenarios.

When asked how it should be approached, and what method of intervention would work best, a common answer across the school was more parental involvement. This concept came up throughout interviews across different questions and age ranges. The reception and KS1 children stated they would prefer telling their parents as they felt "more confident" (Child 2B) and lower KS2 reinforced this by the majority making reference to parents "being more bothered" (Child 4C) about issues of bullying. Teachers also felt parents should have more input, with a large portion of the individuals making reference to "parents and

teachers working collaboratively" (T3) to ensure all pupils involved understand the effects

bullying can have on an individual. This brings forth the idea of utilising parents more

effectively when instances of bullying arise.

Discussion

Overall, the main findings of this study were that bullying is defined differently based on age

range. It can also differ with regards to what bullying entails. Additionally, although teachers

were the first to be called upon to handle instances of bullying, this was not always

perceived as effective by the children, depending on their age. The findings question the

effectiveness of teacher intervention and whether there is enough support for those

involved, as well as the teachers. Finally, an increase in parental involvement is thought to be

a way to improve practice when it comes to how to approach bullying in the future.

Perceptions of bullying

The first theme to be discussed is the perceptions of bullying and how different the

definitions are. This was a main aspect of the research question, and the findings suggest

that it was difficult to obtain a cohesive definition that everyone agreed with. This is

consistent when compared to wider research (Espelage 2018.) However, when looking at the

findings on a deeper level, there were consistencies across age ranges. Smith et al (2002)

and O'Brien (2019) state that children's definitions of bullying can be explained by their

stage of development. This reinforces the findings of this study where there were

commonalities between those of the same ages when defining the aspects of what bullying

entails.

The research also found that a large percentage of children relayed that repetition was a pivotal aspect of their personal definition of bullying, whereas their teacher counterparts valued intent more so. When this is compared to wider research it is contradicted. Guerin and Hennessy (2002) state that repetition and intention may not be central to definitions of bullying as once perceived to be. This is a direct contrast to the findings. However, the wider research can be criticised based on it being old as well as newer research such as Hellstrom, Persson and Hagquist (2015) finding the opposite, that repetition is vital. This calls into question whether Guerin and Hennessy's findings are as reliable and relevant in today's society as they were previously.

The result that only reception and KS1 believed bullying was due to how an individual looks was surprising; this is because physical appearance is the most frequent trigger for a child to be victimised and bullied (Armitage 2021.) This was unexpected because there was no reference whether there were criteria needed for a child to be bullied. Vaillancourt et al (2008) stated that it was a child who could not defend themselves that was targeted. This was not reflected in the findings of this research project. The children stated that anyone could be bullied.

 Another aspect of research that differs to the findings is the idea of bullying being transitory (Vaillancourt et al 2023.) The children stated that bullying became more frequent as they got older, contrasting the view that there is a fluctuation of bullying across the school year. Instead of bullying increasing and decreasing as wider research suggests, the findings lean more towards a steady increase as the children get older. This is different from a wider range of research and was not what was expected. Jansen et al (2012) and Babarro et al (2020) state that bullying decreases as a child gets older, which brings into question whether the

results of this study are reliable and generalisable across many different settings. However, Pichel et al (2021) state that although bullying may decrease as children get older, cyberbullying appears to increase. This could reflect the findings as the children did not state what type of bullying it was that increased in this study and could make the findings reflect that of wider research in a more valid context.

When looking at the teachers' perceptions on how bullying is defined, they valued intent as a key decider on how to categorise and indicate whether a situation was bullying or not. When this is compared to wider research, it is supported by Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) who state that in order to define aggressive behaviour as bullying there is a necessity for intentionality to be present. However, wider research emphasises the difficulty in deciding between an instance being bullying or "children being mean" (Buglass et al 2021), calling into question how to decide if a situation has serious intent behind it. This has a strong link to what to input into future practice as it has a direct link to what current teachers use to decide what they perceive as bullying. When looking at how this should inform future practice, teachers should be more cautious about what they dismiss as not being bullying based on their own definitions and should instead consider the severity of the situation, not only considering it as serious if there is intent (Haig et al 2013.)

Teacher Confidence and Capability

The second theme that will be discussed is teacher confidence and capability when dealing with instances of bullying. The research found that although teachers stated that they were confident in their ability to effectively handle situations of bullying, the children felt unsupported by them. When comparing these results to wider research, they are reflected in some respects, but contradicted in others. Firstly, the idea that children do not feel

supported by teachers is a common theme when looking at alternative research. De Luca, Nocentini and Menesini (2019) state that teachers are viewed by children as providing limited support to the victims of bullying and that teachers lack of intervention justifies negative bullying behaviour, resulting in children labelling it as normal (Campaert et al 2017.) However, Wachs et al (2019) state that teachers are often the first adults that children contact when an episode of bullying occurs, calling into question why the children would do that if they truly deemed it unsupportive. This leads to doubts about whether the support is not useful and effective, or if the children are pushing their frustration with the situation onto the teacher as a coping mechanism (Frivold Kostol and Cameron 2020.)

When looking further at the findings, there was reference to the teachers wanting more training with regards how to appropriately react and prevent instances of bullying. Verseveld et al (2019) state that antibullying programmes and training had a significant impact on teacher intervention. They found that the effectiveness of intervention increased when completing the programmes and that a combination of methods taught and further training had a positive impact on the school as a whole (Vreeman and Carroll 2007.) However, Silva et al (2017) did a very similar study but found that these antibullying programmes had no effects at all on teacher intervention and impact. This questions whether these results are relative to the school it is implemented in, and the generalisability of the results across alternative educational settings.

Methods of intervention and their success

When looking at the effectiveness of intervention, a large number of the participants emphasised the idea of additional parental involvement within the school when issues of bullying arise. The children believed it would make them feel more comfortable and the

teaching staff felt that by working as cohesive team with the parents, it would help to solve problems quicker and more effectively. Man, Liu and Xue (2022) reinforce this idea when they state that parental connectedness and bonding played a positive role in improving the mental health of those who experienced bullying. However, when reviewing further literature surrounding the topic, Horton, Forsberg and Thornberg (2023) stated that parents were actually a prohibitor on a teacher's ability to combat bullying behaviours. This was due to an increase in accountability when parents were overseeing how the situation was dealt with in finer detail than if there was less parental involvement.

A further aspect of research that would have implications for future practice is the concept of government guidance surrounding the prevention of bullying. The findings of this research project reflect the idea that the current documentation provided for schools on bullying is unrealistic, hard to implement and is too vague to be applicable in an educational setting and work. The teachers wanted more emphasis on the mental side of bullying and for the guidance to have more practical application. When comparing this outcome to current research such as that of Hall (2017), the findings were mixed when reviewing whether anti-bullying policy and documentation was useful, or whether it was not applicable enough for educational practice. He found that although policy typically; prohibits certain behaviours, promotes positive behaviours and discourages negative actions, there is no relationship between having an anti-bullying policy and the effectiveness of the intervention to bullying (O'Brennan, Waasdorp and Bradshaw 2014.)

Limitations

A limitation of this research is the risk of the findings not being a true representation of the child's feelings. Due to bullying being a sensitive issue, it could cause some of the results to

be an invalid representation of the individuals' true beliefs (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2018.) Another limitation is that the sample of children is much larger than that of the teachers. Throughout this research project the two groups have been compared on different issues. However, this is a limitation of the study as the argument may be misleading. This is because the sample of children was 36 interviews, compared to only 3 interviews and 6 questionnaires from the teachers. This causes a potential overemphasising of findings (Ross and Bibler Zaidi 2019.) However, this was combatted by separating the sample of children further into smaller groups for the comparisons. Therefore comparing 12 children with 6 teachers, a much smaller gap than if it was 36.

Conclusion

Overall, this case study found that definitions of bullying was individualistic, but each person had a basis of two key aspects. These were: the act being repetitive and having intention behind it. After analysing the findings from this study, as well as reviewing wider literature on the subject my current definition created is as follows: "Bullying is repeatedly hurting someone with intent. This could be physically, verbally, emotionally, or psychologically, online or face to face." The second aspect of this research project is how should it be approached. The most effective way to deal with bullying is through utilising trusted adults and holistically supporting children both in school and at home. Children felt most supported when teachers and parents worked in a partnership to combat instances of bullying. There are a few instances where the findings contradict that of wider research. This could be due to this research project having a larger portion of student voice and data compared to the recent literature, which tends to be more observationally based.

When considering the findings of this paper and the impact it will have on future practice, this research emphasises the need for updated guidance from the government with regards to bullying. There is also a call for more training to help teachers feel competent and comfortable with handling bullying as effectively as possible. There is weight with regards to teachers creating a positive learning environment to ward off potential bullying scenarios. Although the findings are from a small sample size, the results are still applicable to other educational settings due to teachers needing to consistently undertake Continuing Professional Development (Njenga 2022.)

There is scope for future research to further investigate how best to support teachers on how to deal with instances of bullying. As well as this it would be insightful to research further into the concept of "the bully" in more detail. Most of the research looks into the victims and not the bullies, therefore it could be useful to investigate the reasons why a child bullies in closer detail. There is also a gap in research when looking at progression across both primary and secondary phases. It could be useful for future research to investigate bullying in secondary school and if there are similar implications than that of in primary schools. Overall, there is a noticeable lack of child voice throughout bullying research and therefore, in the future it should be a priority in order to gain valid and reliable raw data from those actually experiencing situations of bullying.

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