ABSTRACT

Bullying commonly refers to repeated, unprovoked harmful actions by one child or children against another. It is a form of aggressive behaviour that is often characterized by an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. All over the world there has been an extraordinary rise in interest in understanding the phenomenon of bullying, however, relatively little research has been carried out in India to understand the current prevalence and incidence of bullying among school children. Only a few studies have taken on the mammoth task of conducting a multi component comparative study of an anti-bullying intervention program. This study investigated the results of the Second Step Violence Prevention Program (SSVPP), which is an anti-bullying intervention, in reducing aggression among 11 year old boys.

The research was carried out in four phases - Phase 0 – Pilot Phase; Phase 1 – Main study Phase 2 – Intervention Phase; and Phase 3 – Follow Up Phase.

In phase 0, the pilot phase, student tools were tested and refined based on the requirement. Three tools were finalized for phase 1. The My Life in School Checklist (MLSC) by Arora and Thompson (2001), The What School is Like For Me (WSLFM ) survey by the Committee for Children (2004), and the The Peer Relations Questionnaire by Rigby and Slee (1993).

In phase 1 of the study, 347 males, 6th graders, in 5 all-boys and 5 co-ed schools in Bangalore, India were administered the questionnaires to determine the socio-demographic profile of bullying behavior among boys. Demographic factors such as type of school [all-boys vs. mixed-sex], academic performance, number of years in the present school, order of birth, and type of family were studied. The researcher also explored whether these factors affect the incidence of bullying and children’s attitude towards bullying as a negative behavior.
Male students in all-boy’s schools were found to report higher incidence of being bullied, and they also showed a more favourable attitude towards bullying. Victims of bullying found it hard to be assertive and they displayed a more favourable attitude towards bullying. However, assertive students were found to enjoy friendly interactions. Non-assertive students on the other hand got bullied and enjoyed lesser friendly interactions. Links were also found between bullying and demographic factors such as number of years in the present school, academic performance and order of birth.

In phase 2 of the study – the intervention phase - three ‘all-boys’ schools that had reported the highest incidence of bullying were identified based on high scores on three indices – Bullying Index, Bully scale and Acceptance of Bullying/Aggression. Of the three schools showing the highest scores, one school was assigned to the Intervention group (n=32) and two schools were assigned to the Control group (n=56). The mean age of the sample was 11.47 years (S.D. = 0.71).

Students in the intervention group were administered a 11-session, social skills training program, called the Second Step Violence Prevention Program (SSVPP).

Middle school teachers from both the intervention and control groups were interviewed to find out how aware they were of bullying and to help them become aware of the extent of bullying and victimization within their schools as well as to justify the researchers’ intervention efforts.

Parents of the intervention students were provided with information regarding bullying and how they could tackle it through a booklet that was prepared specifically for this sample.

No intervention was provided to the students in the control group.
Post intervention assessment was conducted with the aim of assessing whether the intervention was successful. Results obtained revealed that students who underwent the intervention were able to exhibit more assertiveness in bullying situations, lower amounts of bullying behaviour; and lower instances of being victimized by others at school, in comparison to male students in the control school. Intervention students also reported experiencing higher adult responsiveness when compared to the control group.

Teachers in the intervention school were provided a one-day workshop on awareness of and methods to deal with bullying post student intervention.

In phase 3 of the study, 6 months after the intervention, a follow up assessment was conducted in the three schools to assess whether the improvements’ had sustained.

Results obtained indicated that students in the intervention school continued to maintain the effectiveness of the training and reported higher capability in demonstrating assertive behaviour, lower amounts of bullying - direct and indirect, being victimized and experiencing negative events by other students, in comparison to male students in the control school. They found their adults to be more responsive an approachable, showed lower acceptance towards bullying and were able to perform their bystander responsibilities.

The SSVPP was therefore found to be consistently effective in building the necessary social skills to handle bullying and in changing student attitude towards bullying their peers.