Bullying: what you need to know

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Abstract

This paper will examine the bullying phenomenon and the different factors it involves. The paper will first review the differences between bullying and teasing and will look at the definition of bullying, as well as how bullying is perceived by teachers and students. Statistics of bullying will provide additional information and show the severity and complexity of bullying. This paper will highlight developmental factors that are involved in shaping a bully, such as temperament, attachment, empathy, gender, and relationships with friends. The profile of a bully will be inspected through the lens of the interaction between nature and nurture. The paper will then examine the other participants of bullying incidents such as the victim and bystanders and reveal the reasons for their reactions at the moment of truth. Attention will be given to the bullying of high risk and special groups of children. The paper will then turn to anti-bullying federal and state laws and their problematic terminology. Lastly, an overview of schools and their approaches to the diminishment of bullying will be considered. A concluding statement will suggest that bullying prevention plans focus should shift to teaching children the necessary skills needed to act as bullying incidents happen. This research is intended to help educators and parents oversee the origins from which the bullying phenomenon emerges and consequentially, help resolve bullying among school age children.
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Introduction

Bullying among school children is an old phenomenon. Many adults remember bullying school incidents, as the common perception was that bullying is a relatively standard and harmless experience that most children endured. During the past several years, however, it became increasingly clear that bullying has become a considerable problem, which takes place at every school.

Paul (2010), describes in an article in the New York Times, an act of bullying that was reported against a girl in kindergarten. The girl was physically threatened and forbidden to play with certain girls because her clothes were not good enough for the group of girls.

A recent documentary about bullying among school age children (“Bully”, 2011) filmed over the course of the 2009/2010 school years present stories of adolescents who were affected by bullying acts. The movie opened a window onto the pain and often-endangered lives of bullying victims. The movie reviles an alarming phenomenon that transcends geographic, racial, ethnic and economic borders.

Bullying is a serious matter as it has long lasting consequences. Bullying can be held to account for negative social, academic, physiological, and physical impact in and outside of school. Exposure to bullying by peers found to be related to increased dropout rates, lower self-esteem, having fewer friends, declining grades, and increased illnesses (Ballard, Argus, & Remley, 1999; Rigby, 1999; Sagarese & Giannetti, 1999). Bullying acts have also been found to have a strong
relationship to suicide among teenagers in the US and other countries. (“Bullying and Suicide,” n.d.)

The act of bullying is not an incident that affects only the bully and the victim, it is an act that concerns bystanders, family, and schools. It is an act that occurs in a community and thus involves multiple participants. As such, it needs to be dealt as a multi-faceted phenomenon that occurs in numerous places with multiple participants. It is an alarming phenomenon that affects children lives in which society needs to take responsibility and acknowledge its severity.

**What is Bullying?**

Children, parents, and teachers often hear the term bullying; however, many experts argue that there are important differences between teasing and bullying. Both teasing and bullying involve poking fun at someone, making them look foolish, and joking around with them. Both teasing and bullying can also become physical. Nevertheless, teasing and bullying are very different and hold different characteristics and consequences.

Teasing generally involves a sense of play and mutual joking around. Teasing will rarely involve characteristics such as religion, race, and sexual orientation whereas bullying would most likely would often be directed to these characteristics. (Coulson, n.d) The main difference between bullying and teasing is its prime intent. Bullying intends to do harm, whereas teasing is supposed to be a “no harm” game.
Many experts have tried to define bullying and capture the essence of the bullying phenomenon.

- Dan Olweus (1993) defines bullying as “A student being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort on another” (p. 9)

- Bullying is a display of an asymmetric power relationship whereby the bullied victim is helpless against the one harassing. The bully feels no remorse or anxiety over his behavior and thinks little of the negative implications for their victims. (Rubin, 2002, p.147)

- A continuum of behavior that involves the attempt to gain power and dominance over another (Askew, 1989)

- Intentional (physical and/or psychological) hurt caused to the recipient that is unprovoked occurs repeatedly, and the bully is stronger than the victim or is perceived to be stronger (Smith & Thompson, 1991).

- A form of social interaction not necessarily long-standing, in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive (physical or verbal) behavior that is intended to and does, in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual (the victim) (Stephenson & Smith, 1989).

- Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. (Stopbullying.gov)
Although each expert defined bullying slightly differently, they share two main components. Bullying behavior is a form of victimization that involves two main characteristics; an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, and repeated systematic aggressive behavior of the bully against the victim.

**Does bullying have the same meaning for everyone?**

Although bullying seems to have a very clear definition, research that examined teachers’ and students’ definitions of bullying found that each group’s views on bullying were slightly different. Teachers indicated that bullying is both physical and emotional aggression,” forcing people to do things they do not want to do” (Naylor, Cowir, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). However, a quarter of these teachers did not think that name-calling, spreading rumors, or taking an individual’s belongings were acts of bullying. Furthermore, half of these teachers did not feel that social exclusion is a serious problem for children to experience, thus are not considered as bullying acts. (Naylor et al., 2006)

Children’s views on bullying tend to change as they grow. Eight year old children do not distinguish clearly between the different forms of aggression as a fourteen year-old would. Generally, children tend to see the bullying act as noticeable acts, such as verbal or physical attacks, while overlooking more indirect subtle forms of bullying. Research also suggests that students misjudge the severity and importance of an imbalance of power involved in bullying behavior as only 16% of these students indicated that the bully must be stronger than the victim. In addition, students responses illustrate that bullying is not
directly involved with the bully’s intent as the majority of students believed that intent is not vital to the definition of bullying. (Naylor et al., 2006)

Other research suggests that teachers’ definitions of bullying are different and more complex than those of children, whereas children’s views of bullying are more concrete. Yet, the research also implies that adults are only aware of a small portion of bullying incidents and overlooking important and dangerous aspects of bullying behaviors. (Naylor et al., 2006)

**Different types of bullying**

Olweus (1993) distinguishes between two different kinds of bullying. Direct bullying, which is an open attack on a victim, and indirect bullying, which is shaped by social isolation and excluding a victim from a group. Both examples can also be described as one being physical and the other as relational aggression. Bullying takes many forms and a few types can occur simultaneously.
Physical aggression used to be the primary form of bullying with acts such as hitting, kicking, and pushing mostly taking place at school’s premises. Physical aggression is a visible act, which usually seen as a negative act that is not socially accepted and needs to be eliminated from schools. In recent years, acts of bullying transitioned from physical aggression to cyber bullying, which can take place anytime, and anywhere. Spreading rumors, pictures, and videos are fast, easy, and anonymous.

Gossip among middle and late childhood school children is usually a part of a child development and their ways of defining the “separate social maps of their peer groups” (Rubin, 2002, p. 138). When it changes to negative talk about someone to exclude him/her socially, the behavior transforms to relational aggression. In today's landscape, relational aggression is considered equally, or even more damaging than physical aggression among youth. (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) In the past, relational aggression was shaped in the form of gossip and rumors that passed from one person to another. Today with the use of emails, Facebook and Twitter – it is a much more powerful tool and certainly more destructive than ever before. Cyber bullying has changed the traditional way of bullying, by allowing the bully to become anonymous and enabling bully acts to happen everywhere.

**Bullying by the Numbers**

According to School Bullying Statistics (Bullying Statistics, 2009) the numbers are increasingly alarming; in the United States one out of four children is bullied on a regular basis. Statistics also show that nearly 30% of students are
either bullies or victims of bullying, and 160,000 children stay home from school every day because of fear of bullying. ("Bullying and Suicide," 2009). According to School Bullying Statistics (2010) there are about 2.7 million students being bullied each year by about 2.1 million students who are bullies. About 56% percent of all students have witnessed a bullying crime taking place at school. These numbers suggest that either you are a bully, or being bullied or a bystander; bullying affects everybody.

Bullying incidents mostly occur with children from middle school to high school with the highest incidence of bullying occurring in 4th through 8th grade in which 90% were reported as victims of some type of bullying. (Bullying Statistics, 2010)

The duration of bullying lasts from a few weeks to several months and could even continue for several years. The numbers indicate that school age children are bullied mostly over a period of months.
Statistics also show that a few or many people witness the majority of bullying incidents, whereas fewer incidents are not witnessed at all. These numbers suggest that the majority of bullying incidents could be reported with intervention provided.
The numbers also show that students who choose to report bullying incidents prefer to stay anonymous and not to get involved.

Statistics reveals that cyber bullying and social networking has provided a new environment in which bullying takes place. Teen use of technology is at an all-time high and cell phones are the number one tool teenagers use in communicating with each other.
Social networking provides an entirely new environment for bullying to occur. The massive use of technology by teenagers has created a new trend where most children experienced cyber bullying at least once.
Another interesting information that statistics indicate is that girls are more involved in cyberbullying than boys.

Bullying has become such a serious problem, as many teenagers’ suicides are a result of being bullied. Bullycide is a term used to describe suicide as a result of bullying. Bullycide has grown more than 50% in the past 30 years as teenagers who are either in constant fear or confusion decide to take their life as a result of being bullied.
The numbers show the strong correlation between suicide and cyberbullying victims, which is an indication of the dreadful consequences for bullied children. The numbers clearly show that bullying is large and complex phenomenon that holds potentially catastrophic consequences for youth.

Bullying is not only a local epidemic, it is an international one; however, the violence among U.S. youth is much more severe than in other countries. The numbers indicate that the percentage of students in the U.S feeling safe sometimes, rarely or never is about the same as students feeling often safe. The U.S. is located eight from the end in the illustration below, reaching the top third of countries with children who do not often feel safe at school.

(U.S Teens in Our World, n.d)
The numbers in the chart above clearly show that bullying is a large and growing phenomenon that holds catastrophic consequences for school age children. Bullying is here to stay and numbers of bullying incidents are rising dramatically.
Are Bullies Born or Made? A Profile of a Bully.

In the attempt to find the profile of a bully, there are a few characteristics that most bullies share.

Temperament is a brain system that underlines children's reactivity and self-regulation. Each child’s temperament is different, and it is reflected in the emotions, activity level and attention of each child. It is also varies as to how easily, and intensely children can become frustrated, fearful, and whether they are negatively or positively excited. Research has found a strong connection between temperament differences and aggressive behavior and a connection between temperament dimensions such as anger and discomfort to anti-social behavior (Rothbart, Ahadi, and Hershey, 1994). Temperament refers to the strength of the emotional reaction and behaviors as well as the self-regulation capacities of the child. “Temperament effects the nature of the child’s adjustment to the requirements and challenges of the educational setting” (Rothbard & Jones, 1998, p.479). While in school, a so-called “difficult child” will show signs of emotional difficulty with adjustments, a tendency toward discomfort and being easily frustrated. These signs are likely to start leading to a demonstration of aggressive behavior.

The lack of emotional and social regulation is associated with emotional outbursts and aggression. Children who did not acquire self-regulation through
preschool are at risk of developing aggressive habits during social interactions (Bardove, Leong, 2005, p. 204).

Reviewing the literature points to another psycho-emotional developmental defined as attachment playing a big role in the development of aggressive behavior. The attachment system is an innate system that affects the motivation, emotions and memory with respect to significant figures such as caregivers. It is a biological system, but it is shaped by social interactions. At its core, the attachment system is intended to help an infant’s survival. At the mental level, it also helps establish interpersonal relationships that direct the immature infant’s brain into organizing its own process. Attachment develops as early as seven months and leads to organization changes in behavior and brain function (Siegal, 1999). Attachment can be described as secure or insecure. Secured attachments indicate a relationship that manifests a sense of knowing that there someone to go to when feeling frightened or threatened. The sense of a “secure base” helps a child feel safe to explore the world and develop relationships with others. On the other hand, an insecure attachment will lead a child to constantly feel unprotected without anyone to comfort them. That can lead to poor social skills. The emotional relationships of attachment have a direct influence on mental functioning such as memory, emotions, representations and state of mind. Insecure attachment puts a child at a high risk for psychological and social dysfunction (Siegal, 1999). A study that examined the connection between bullying as the product of an aggressive mindset and insecure attachment in middle school children found a strong correlation between insecure attachment
and bullying behavior (Elliot, Cornell, 2009). Poor attachment can also result in a child's failing to develop empathy and not having the capacity to share or understand others’ happiness and sadness (Gelb, 2002). Lack of empathy combined with low social skills might contribute to peer rejection or the development of aggression (Horne, 1996, p.79).

Children who are exposed to aggressive behavior at home are more likely to act aggressively themselves. Children’s exposure to domestic violence has profound implications regarding their ability to have limited social skills, suffer from depression and have severe anxiety. The home environment plays a major part in a child’s life and has a direct effect on his or her psychological, emotional and social development.

In a research made by UNICEF, it was reported that children who experienced domestic violence are at a higher risk to take part in aggressive acts such as bullying and are three times more likely to be involved in fighting. (“Behind Closed Doors” 2006)

At infancy and toddler years, parents have a direct involvement in their children’s social lives. Parents are the main source when it comes to helping their children in skill building. As children grow, and attend school, their social landscape changes and friendships start playing an increasingly critical role in a child’s development. Adolescents seek the company of their peers and while they seek autonomy from their parents; they also turn to their friends as their main source of support. They share their feelings, problems, fears and doubts and spend more time with their friends than with their parents. In the company of their peers,
children are less likely to be able to control their actions (Rubin, 2003, p.155). Acceptance and popularity are extremely powerful factors for adolescent children, especially to their self-esteem. The desire to “fit in” and the pressure to become popular may increase the likelihood of teasing and bullying behaviors among children. Research that was conducted with middle school children and considered the connection between popularity and bullying found that bullies were among the most popular students in the school (Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). The need to be popular and being respected by peers may lead to a bully act, which will portray the bully as the focus of admiration among the group.

Another factor that affects the profile of a bully is gender. From a young age, boys prefer to pretend play in games of power and aggression, opting to play contact competitive sports and engage in activities that promote excitement and control. On the other hand, what generally matters for girls are non-contact activities and talking with friends. Girls tend to have long conversations, share their experiences and thoughts with their best girlfriend (Rubin, 2003 p.128-129). A fight is a rarity for girls and physical aggression is more common among boys. Although relational aggression is practiced by both genders, it is more common among girls (Crick, and Gerotpeter, 1995). The differentiation of gender as to the use of physical or relational aggression is also an acceptable norm among the children themselves. A study that tested norms of bullies among boys and girls found that boys saw aggressive behavior as the norm for bullying directed toward their peers and girls saw the norm of bully act as relational aggression (Crick, and Bigbee, 1996).
Using psycho-emotional development characteristics which include temperament, empathy, attachment and social ecologies development such as home environment and friendships are key factors in describing the profile of a bully. A child who has a temperament with an apparent tendency toward discomfort and frustration, one who is lacking empathy and has poor attachment and poor social skills; a child who is exposed to domestic violence and whose peers encourage aggressive behavior is at a high risk of becoming a bully. There is a strong correlation between these two developmental elements and their direct effect to a child’s behavior. The psycho-emotional state of a child is affected directly from their social ecologies structures. Relationships among family, friends and school environment contribute to the development of a child’s psycho-emotional state and, consequently, to his behavior.

Development is a complex process, and although factors were found that might help shape a bully, it is important to mention that many children that experienced similar scenarios in life did not develop aggressive behavior. In the literature reviewed, it is repeatedly noted that children are at risk, tend, most probably – words that imply the likelihood of something to happen but not a certainty.

Examining the profile of a bully through the endless conflict between nature and nurture, it can be argued that nurture wins this battle. Psycho-ecologies development infers from its name that nurture is the key of influence, therefore, peer relationship and home environment immediately fall into that category. The ability to self-regulate and attachment are biological systems that are structured
by social interactions. Parenting style attains types of attachment. The ability to self-regulate is achieved through parenting combined with school interaction, which are also manipulated by nurture. Gender falls under nature; however, both genders participate in the bully act only using different methods. Temperament is a biological and genetic system, and although we are accustomed to thinking of genes and environment as separate, reality indicates that they always work together. Though each child carries unique genetic tendencies, interacting with the environment makes it possible to alter those tendencies.

The Victims

Children at a high risk of being bullied have certain characteristics that distinguish them from others. There are at least two types of victims of bullying, passive and reactive victims. The typical bullying victims are passive victims who are perceived as different from the norm with regard to their weight, clothes, speech, and sexual orientation. Children with few friends and little social support at school that are either physically weak or lack confidence in their strengths are at risk of being bullied. They avoid confrontation and do not defend themselves. (Kuther, n.d)

Reactive victims are not as common as passive victims, and they characterize children who provoke attacks by being aggressive and argumentative. These victims retaliate when bullied and often there is a thin line referring them as victim/bully. It is extremely difficult to identify reactive victims as they often tease/bully their bully and others.
Ironically, some victims of bullying turn to the other side and become the ones who bully. A recent article about how a victim becomes a bully describes a child who was bullied turn into a bully trying to deflect some of the bullying he experienced to others. (Byrne, 2012)

Victims of bullying attacks often feel they do not have control on the situation, and their family members are over-involved in their decisions. Victims often blame themselves for being bullied, and the situation they got themselves. (Carney, Hazler and Higgins, 2002, p. 96)

There are certain groups of children who are at a higher risk of being victimized than others. Gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender and children with disabilities are at a higher risk of being bullied by peers.

A few researches concerning bullying among children with disabilities found that, children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied, and sixty percent of students with disabilities reported being bullied. (“Bullying and Harassment”, n.d.) Children, based on their disability, appearance, and other behavioral patterns related to their disability are often bullied.

Children and youth with perceived differences in sexual orientation are also at a high risk of being bullied by peers. Gay and lesbian teens are two to three times more likely to commit suicide and thirty percent of teen suicides were related to sexual identity. Statistics reveal that nine out of ten LGBT children have reported being bullied within the last year. (Gay Bullying Statistics, n.d.)

The implication of children being victimized is horrific. Victims of bullying often feel humiliated, helpless, hopeless and depressed. Victims of
bullying attacks spend their days avoiding school, avoiding being seen in the hallways and school bus trying to become invisible. Many bullying victims get emotionally hurt and spend many years after school receiving help to get over their psychological pains. The implications of being bullied could even be seen in adulthood employment and wage rates as a recent article found that victims of bullying earn less and have a higher chance of unemployment. (Silvera, 2013)

The most horrendous consequence resulting from bullying is suicide. There is a strong link between bullying and victims of bullying attempting to commit suicide or actually succeeding doing so. Bullying related suicide is connected to any type of bullying which includes physical, emotional, cyberbullying, sexting, and circulating rumors and pictures among other children. ("Bullying and Suicide," n.d.).

Although there are many factors that come into play for high-risk children of being bullied, it does not necessarily means that these children will be bullied. (Stopbullying.gov: Children at risk of being bullied)

**Bystanders**

Statistics indicates that over half (about 56%) of all students have witnessed a bullying crime take place while at school. (Bullying Statistics, 2010) The bystander role in a bullying incident is extremely important, perhaps the most important one to bullying prevention.

Bystanders are very different from bullies and the victims as they have the choice to either stay in or out of the situation. There are three categories of
bystanders’ behaviors, defending the victim, reinforcing the bully, and remaining uninvolved. (Padget and Notar, 2013, p. 39))

Although children witness many bullying incidents in their school years and identify bullies behaviors as wrong, they often remain uninvolved. Many children feel anxious and helpless, which explains the reasons for their inaction. Bystanders are often afraid to be bullied and ostracized if they decide to intervene in a bullying attack.

Ironically, the greater number of bystanders presents in emergency incidents the less likely anyone would intervene. There are two major factors to explain the bystander effect. First the presence of others creates a distribution of responsibility so that individuals do not feel the pressure to take action and intervene. Second, is the need to behave in a socially correct way and when others fail to act it is perceived as a sign that there is no need to response. (Cherry, n.d.)

A recent study that examines bystanders strategy production to bullying found, “Children do not know how best to confront a bully” (Rock, 2012, p. 414) suggesting that children do not have the skills to respond to the bully and generate intervention strategies. Conversely, children who were uninvolved had no sense of personal responsibility neither helping their peers nor having the self-reliance to do so. Children who reinforce the bully seem to be motivated by aggression much like the bully. (Poyhonen, Juvonen, and Salmivalli, 2012, p. 723)

Children were also found to believe that different bullying incidents could be intervened by diverse strategies. Children considered getting a teacher in
response to physical aggression, whereas relational aggression was perceived as under control by the children and thus manageable. (Rock, 2012, p. 422)

Bystander’s actions also differ according to their age and gender. Significant differences were found between first/second graders and older children generating intervention strategies. Rock and Baird (2012) suggest bullying intervention skills training should be planned by age, saying, “Children’s ability to develop many viable strategies by third grade suggests that skills training in intervention programs should be adjusted based on children’s age, even within the elementary school years” (p.421).

Gender differences were also found to be a factor in the types of bullying intervention strategies children generated. Girls more often than boys helped victims of bullying, and were more affected by the primary story of the victim (Rock and Baird, 2012 p. 421).

These findings suggest that bullying intervention plans are not “one size fits all” in a mixed–gender setting, and that are many factors that come into play when creating an effective intervention plans for schools.

**Anti-bullying Laws**

Anti-bullying state laws are meant to promote a school’s safety and reduce violence. Anti-bullying laws also require schools to create policies for prevention, training, and enforcement concerning behaviors that may lead to bullying. The anti-bullying laws not only specifically discuss what happens to students who violate the anti bullying provisions, but also discuss the implications for schools of large monetary fines that can arise out of civil liability.
Although bullying and violence at schools was and still is a widely spread concern, only in the last twelve years has the focus on bullying intensified. The focus on youth bullying became greater when the high profile Columbine High School shooting incident happened in 1999 and ignited a new wave of legislation against bullying. A numerous amount of suicides among school age children linked to bullying attacks further attracted national attention into creating systems that would effectively reduce and prevent bullying in schools. (Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies, 2011)

Georgia was the first state to pass bullying legislation requiring schools to implement character education specifically designed to address bullying prevention. From 1999 to 2010 there were more than 120 bills enacted addressing bullying and related behaviors in schools. Twenty-nine new bills were passed between 2010-2011, leaving only four states, Hawaii, Michigan, Montana, and South Dakota without bullying laws. (Policies and Laws, Stop bullying, n.d)

State legislation provides the variable characteristics for policy that guide at the state and school level, whereas the policy is more directed to the implementation in schools. There are 27 states’ laws that either encourage or require developing policies that address harassment, intimidation or bullying in schools and 41 states have developed either state guidelines or bullying policy. Although the bully epidemic reaches school age children wherever they are, strangely South Dakota was the last state to sign in laws that cover bullying on March 19 2012. (Coulson, n.d)
The main difference between state legislation and state model policies and guidelines is set in the key components that they address. State policies and guidelines are more focused on enumeration of groups and their inclusion, requirements concerning recording and investigation of bullying incidents, addressing the mental health needs of children who bully and those who have been bullied, and transparency and monitoring of bullying attacks. State legislation is more likely to address issues of victims’ rights to peruse legal redress under federal or state laws, and contain the language with regard to the scope or jurisdiction of the law. (Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies, 2011)

New York State Education Law 10-18, 814 covers bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and defines bullying and harassment as the “creation of a hostile environment by conduct or by threats, intimidation or abuse.” This law does not follow the research-based definition of bullying, which specifically discuss the repeated pattern of aggressive behavior involving the imbalance of power using the terms bullying and harassment interchangeably.

The Education Law puts its focus on the acts that have a tremendous effect on students’ academic performance, and students’ emotional and physical well being. These acts occur either on school property, or there is a possibility for disruption in the school environment.

New York State Education Law discusses bullying and harassment targeted toward groups such as race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender and sex although not limited to
these characteristics (NYC Anti Bullying laws, Stop bullying, n.d). The Education Law mentions cyberbullying as a form of harassment/bullying occurring through electronic communication; however, it does not discuss that in most cases cyberbullying is done outside of the school’s premises.

The original legislation amended State Education Law by creating Article 2- Dignity for all Students. Article 2 also amended section 801-A of the New York State Education Law expanding the concept of tolerance, dignity and respect for others. The Dignity Act also amended section 2801 requiring the board of Education to include language addressing codes of conduct. In addition, schools will be responsible for collecting and reporting information concerning discrimination and harassment.

The All Dignity Act focuses on the prevention of discriminatory behaviors by promoting educational measures meant to create a positive school environment and culture, and also requires schools to take action when students experience cyberbullying, bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

There is no doubt this legislation is important, which is essential to the state’s ongoing effort to improve education and enable every child’s right to feel safe in school. Teachers are asked to take a training workshop to raise awareness and sensitivity to acts of bullying and harassment, identify such acts and understand the effects of such acts on children. However, personally attending the workshop, it does not train or elaborate on the methods and strategies teachers should use when intervening in such acts.
In spite of the fact that most people believe anti-bullying laws are important legislation, there are those who emphasize the negative side of anti-bullying laws.

Post (2013), reveals in his article that some administrators worry about the costs related to anti-bullying laws. New anti-bullying laws require schools to develop and implement anti-bullying prevention plans without considering the added cost. Administrators and teachers say that anti-bullying laws place unreasonable demands on teachers. As the funding picture of anti-bullying laws is unclear and with a higher academic demand from teachers and a new evaluation system, teachers are left with little or no time to develop and implement anti-bullying laws.

Furthermore, unintended consequences of the law such as the easiness of labeling and reporting bullying incidents is another concern raised by educators and administrators. The assumption is that the anti-bullying laws would prevent children from handling conflicts and solve a disagreement between peers by themselves. (Hu, 2011) This concern raises a question regarding children’s ability to develop intervention skills, which are crucial when dealing with bullying.

Anti-bullying laws represent an important step in the fight against bullying, however, the big question is whether the laws are realistic and effective in the fight against bullying.

**Intervention plans**

Bullying is a large-scale epidemic that policy makers, schools and educators need to face and take action; however, it is unclear which anti-bullying
program is the most effective eliminating bullying. The Federal Department of Education held, for the first time, a “bullying prevention summit” in August, 2010 and issued a letter to schools and educators in October, 2010 to guide and support the fight against bullying. The letter highlights the legal obligation to protect students from student-on-student harassment. The Department of Education also posted a web page asking their readers for suggestions of how to fight bullying in schools. (U.S Department of Education Bullying Summit, 2010)

A typical school reaction to bullying is to get through and punish. Many schools adopted “zero tolerance,” “student exclusion” or "three strikes” policies. These policies have predetermined consequences, which are often executed with severe punishment regardless of the circumstances of situational context. The main problems with these approaches are that they might discourage children from reporting the act itself and that these policies do not tackle the behavioral problem of the bully. The common believe is that by removing a disruptive student from school it becomes a safer place for other students. Severe punishment of students who misbehaved is also seen as a tool that helps improve children’s behavior in schools. However, research that examined the “Zero Tolerance” policy at schools found that, “ Zero tolerance has not been shown to improve school climate or schools safety (”Are zero tolerance policies effective in school?” p. 860) Suggesting that “Zero tolerance” and other similar punishment policies are ineffective preventing bullying and elevating schools safety.
There are many prevention plans offered to schools that are long-term and educational-based. Schools need to take a proactive position and choose a program that will fit their circumstances best.

Different prevention programs use the same factors trying to eliminate the bullying phenomenon. Most of the bullying prevention plans aim to reduce and prevent aggressive action and to create a better school environment for children.

The Olweus prevention plan is a very popular one that many schools use. It is an evidence-based program and uses an ecological model. This is a long-term plan with a system wide program that involves everyone in school. School level, individual, class and community are all involved in the process of fighting against the bullying phenomenon. The target of the plan is to involve all of the parties by talking about the phenomenon and introducing to the school's community the program rules. Each member of the school’s community needs to take responsibility implementing the program. A few members of the school’s staff undergo training where they would be introduced to research and the impact of bullying on children. The trained staff would also learn key strategies to address bullying and become the school’s experts in bullying prevention. The main idea is that the trained staff would continue their work and train the other staff of school to understand the bullying phenomenon and provide them with the knowledge and skills intervening in bullying behaviors. (Olweus, 2013)

Although the intervention is not a part of the curriculum, it is a significant part of the school’s agenda and children and educators are expected to have discussions on bullying on a weekly basis. There is a significant emphasis on the
participation of the community with intervention, and it is a crucial part in the fight against bullying. (Olweus, 2013)

Another evidence-based program is called the “Second Step” program. This program attempts to fight bullying by creating a safer environment in schools as well as increasing children’s social competence. The program includes an online training for all the staff members on curricula-based programs designed to be presented in a classroom setting. The lessons are designed for children grades K-3 including story based lessons, skill practice, and academic activities. The “Second Step” program aims to develop responsible bystander skills where children are learning to stand up for themselves and their peers. “Second Step “ also offers other programs for older children, which are more directed towards learning of social skills and self-advocacy. (Second Step, 2013)

Some intervention plans are implemented during lessons plans and others through all school meetings. During lessons and meetings, children are presented with bullying acts and expected to develop empathy and tolerance towards their peers.

There are many intervention programs available in the market for schools to choose the one that would work best for them. Effective prevention plans must have strong administrative leadership and commitment from all adult participants. The program needs to be an integral and an ongoing part of the school’s agenda with a strong community involvement. The major goal of the program should be on creating a school climate that encourages caring and discourage bullying behavior.
The concept behind bullying prevention plans sounds very promising in the fight against bullying; however, research examining the success of anti-bullying programs in schools concluded that on average bullying decreased by 20%-23%. (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010) The success rate numbers are low and raise a significant concern of the effectiveness of various bullying prevention plans implemented in schools.

Additionally, a new concern recently rose as a new research examined whether anti-bullying programs are causing the opposite effect and teach children how to become bullies. An extensive research study revealed that bullying prevention plans in schools caused students becoming more inclined to encounter peer victimizations. The research suggests that bullies learned several anti-bullying techniques while maintaining their social dominate status and continuing their bullying activities. Children learned new ways to bully without leaving a trace making bullies more sophisticated and ruthless than ever. (Seokjin and Byung, 2013)

Some parents and educators feel that anti-bullying laws teach children how to snitch on each other instead of facing different social scenarios by themselves. For example, New Jersey law enables students’ reporting to the police through an anonymous tips hot line. The new laws also requires students to stop any bullying incident they see; however, the law does not provide further information about the skills and ways to deescalate a bullying incident. (Hu, 2011)
Conclusion

Bullying is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon affecting school-age children. Bullying, without a doubt, is a widespread and serious epidemic with catastrophic consequences. Statistics show that bullying affects everybody—the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. The effects of bullying are serious, with long-term physical and mental health issues. Most targeted children are perceived as different from the norm, and the bullying may have its roots in the bully's attitude toward differences in race, sexual orientation, learning or physical disabilities, etc. A growing, diverse population in society and schools increases the problem of bullying.

The anti-bullying movement and schools turn to many intervention plans that aim to teach children how to respect and celebrate diversity, with the belief that these plans make children less likely to become bullies.

However, the success rate of bullying prevention plans does not look promising and in schools has been found to be relatively small, decreasing bullying incidents by an average of 20 to 23 percent. (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010) This suggests that such prevention plans are not as successful in eliminating bullying from schools as we would hope them to be.

The complexity of the bullying phenomenon, which involves many factors, is reflected in the complexity of various prevention and intervention plans. Although administration and schools try to eradicate the bullying phenomenon, the reality shows us that it is very much alive. However, a big question remains: what more can be done in the fight against bullying?
Bullying prevention plans that promote tolerance and mindfulness in schools are extremely important in the fight against bullying. The bullying prevention plans promote empathy and tolerance among children generating school’s communities, which are more resilient to bullying acts.

However, bullying prevention plans are clearly not enough. Bullying is a social illness that has always existed and will always exist; therefore, we should teach children how to face it. Bullying prevention plans aim at preventing bullying, but the reality is that bullying is not going away anytime soon.

Bystanders are the real key to stopping bullying, and bullying prevention plans should focus on teaching children how to act when a bullying incident happens. Tsang, Hui and Law, (2011) strongly believe in the importance of a bystander role in school bullying, saying, “Peer bystanders, who are the biggest group in school bullying and who may choose to adopt a variety of roles in school bullying, can decisively influence the intensity and outcome of bullying by assuming different roles or positions in the bullying process” Bystanders’ position taking as a strategic intervention, acknowledges the critical function of peer bystanders eliminating the bullying phenomenon. Tsang, Hui and Law, (2011) continue to say that the most important characteristics to develop are positive identity, self-efficacy, and self-determination to become constructive helpers in schools bullying.

The implication is that bullying prevention plans should explicitly teach the necessary character skills that will enable children to intervene, de-escalate, and eliminate bullying incidents. Providing children with the appropriate
strategies, language, and determination to combat bullying, in turn, will enable them to become self-advocates and peer victimization interventionists.

Statistics indicates that many bullying incidents are never reported. One research study found that bystanders are present in 85% of bullying incidents, but intervene in only 10% of them, which implies that bystander’s reaction could play a strong role in bullying prevention. (Jeffery, 2004)

Additionally, providing children with the necessary skills and knowledge for bullying intervention could also reverse the bystander effect. Once a child speaks up and intervenes in a bullying episode, others will likely join in the interventionist effort.

Furthermore, when one is planning explicit instruction in bullying intervention strategies for students, one should take into account the genders and ages of the students as different ages and genders require different skills.

Bullying is a multi layered and complex phenomenon. The belief that telling children to stop bullying and accept differences would eliminate bullying is unrealistic. Acknowledging that bullying is here to stay and prepare children to face and challenge bullying would enable children become more resilient and powerful against it.

Final Thoughts

When I started writing this paper, I knew the seriousness of the bullying phenomenon and its implications. I also knew that policy makers and schools
address this problem and trying to fight it. What I did not know was how little proactive actions schools are taking. Whether it is budget issues or just personal views of the principals, most of the schools I visited had minimal conversations with students about bullying. Large-scale bullying prevention or intervention plans were almost non-existent. At my son's school, students meet on a monthly basis in the auditorium to sing songs and see short plays about bullying, which espouse to strengthen the community and prevent bullying.

I find it hard to believe that, there are so many schools, which are not taking any actions to combat bullying. It is especially surprising with the growing online form of bullying. In the absence of any funded, multifaceted programs, schools, teachers and parents need to be alert for any irregularity in a child’s behavior. Both bullying victims and bullies need help and support from their communities, to overcome the challenges of the bullying phenomenon. It requires a proactive and joint effort from schools and families to fight effectively against this phenomenon as society battles to prevent and eliminate bullying.
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