BULLYING IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews literature involving bullying in higher education. Bullying is an undesired, repeated behavior that is intimidating. One person is performing the behavior while one is receiving the behavior who is better known as the victim. Bullying is seen often when elementary, middle, and high schools are being studied. Higher education is overlooked in this area due to belief that bullying decreases as people get older. Research has shown this is not the case due to adult bullying still being a problem in today's society. This warrants a review of literature to show what research has been done in higher education and what gaps are still problematic in this area. Bullying can take place between students, educators, or administration. Common areas that have shown up in the literature are types of bullying, higher education environment, online classrooms, cyberbullying, victim's responses, and prevention. Bringing in the research in higher education can help with prevention as well as help to the victims.

Keywords: *bullying, higher education, college, classroom*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a social problem from a repeated, undesired behavior that is intimidating to a person. This behavior is a direct or indirect aggressive act that is deliberate. In the education and classroom setting this can be a student to student, educator to student, or administration to educator in terms of who is involved in the bullying act. An act is not considered bullying if the parties involved are equal and have occasional disagreements or if they rules are stated in a curriculum and disagreements arise (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). It is important to be able to differentiate between disagreements and bullying in order to effectively handle the situations.

Research has brought to attention that bullying is not just a childhood behavior since it can transition into higher education and perhaps life. This is an epidemic in America for students as well as educators, who are experiencing bullying at the workplace (Washington, 2015). Bullying can be vertical or horizontal phenomenon. Vertical bullying involves someone who is subordinate to the other. This would be administration to educator or educator to student type of bullying. Horizontal bullying occurs between two equal parties, for example student to student bullying with students who are in the same year in school. The interpretation of these types of bullying depends on the experience, who is being bullied, and their interpretation of the act (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014).

Whoever is the experiencing the repeated, undesired behavior is known as the victim of bullying. Victims can suffer from anxiety and depression which may lead them to drop out of school or quit their jobs. Suicide is a final outlet some take to avoid being bullied (Washington, 2015). How a person reacts to bullying is important to note as this is why is it important to realize bullying is taking place and how it can affect someone.

Research on bullying did not start until around the 1970s in Europe. To date, most research has been on elementary, middle, and high school bullying with rates of bullying decreasing through the school years (Chapbell et al., 2006). Only a few studies have been conducted on bullying in higher education. Since one may think bullying is decreasing throughout school, higher education has been overlooked at and not studied for incidences as often. A literature review can bring in the current research as well as research that is still needed in the higher education. Knowing how bullying is being perceived in the higher education classroom is important so steps can be created to combat the deliberate acts.

A review of the literature was conducted using CINAHL complete and Education Research Complete databases for peer reviewed journal articles. Searches included bullying in the classroom, cyberbullying, bullying in higher education, and bullying in college. Related articled emerged from 2006 to present. The literature for this topic yielded results that included topics of types of bullying, higher education, online classrooms, victim's responses, and prevention.

LITERATURE

Research literature has conducted studies involving higher education bullying that focuses on student's or educator's perception of different forms of bullying. First describing different types of bullying builds a foundation to understand how bullying is classified and how it can be seen in different settings.

The literature brings in different areas that have been looked at and where gaps are missing for future research to be conducted.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Bullying does not come in one form and can be demonstrated in various ways. A study by Olweus (as cited in Duy, 2013) classified bullying in two ways. These classifications included "direct bullying" which describes open attacks on the victim and "indirect bullying" which involves bullying that can be invisible in nature. Indirect bullying can cause social isolation that others may understand (Duy, 2013).

There has been other research that has categorized bullying in different ways other than the two ways by Olweus. Another way to classify bullying is in three grouping categories including physical (punching, kicking, pushing), verbal (name calling, spreading gossip, insulting), and psychological (damaging one's possessions, writing threating notes) (Duy, 2013). Hawker and Boulton (as citied in Duy, 2013) categorized bullying in five categories which are indirect, relational, physical, verbal, and generic. Generic bullying may be making fun, harassing, or tormenting the victim. Sexual bullying can be a form of relational bullying (Duy, 2013). These classifications give a background of bullying and how it has been classified.

One area that has been left out of previous classifying of types of bullying is electronic bullying, better known as the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Electronic bullying has provided another form for bullies to harm victims. Bullying can take the form of text messages, messages over the internet, and other digital communication. Students in higher education are experiencing this form more and more often in different classroom including online classrooms (Washington, 2015).

HIGHER EDUCATION

It is important to have a background of the different types of bullying to know what is being seen in higher education. There is not just one type of bullying that everything falls under. At the higher education level, one may expect an encouraging and amicable environment that is equal for everyone. Bullying has been seen as an act one is using to preserve their self-worth or lack of social skills in the adult population. Students who have a dissimilar opinion for the norm are seen more often as the target for bullying. Yet, no single factor has been seen in research as the cause of bullying in higher (Meriläinen, Puhakka, & Sinkkonen, 2015).

At a higher education level, Sinkkonen, Puhakka, and Meriläinen (2014) stated bullying may increase as resources decrease. Students may be competing for the same monies or educational placements. Administration or educators may be too busy to give students advice because there is not enough personal to complete all needed tasks. Also, when an educator feels insecure in their position, it can lead to negative behavior toward their students. These types of bullying may be unintentional at first but lead to long-term behavior that turns to bullying (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014).

Bullying between students. A study at a Finnish university found most of the bullying was tensions between students. The common bullying claims included exclusion from groups, unequal treatment, avoiding contact, gossiping, humiliating, and name calling (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). Another study by Cooper, Walker, Winters, Williams, Askew, and Robinson (2009), looked at how nursing students bully each other in the classroom. Verbal abuse was most frequently reported which would make the student feel belittled or humiliated. Many of the students used avoidance behaviors and were ineffective in combating the unwanted bullying. Cooper et al. (2009) expressed worry if nursing students are not able to overcome bullying actions, how that could transpire into the clinical setting.

Educator bullying. Good rapture is needed between educator and students for students' perception of motivation, learning, and grades in the classroom. A study, by Marraccini, Weyandt, and Rossi (2015), used a questionnaire to analyze student's perception of educator bullying in the higher education classroom. Bullying in this study was defined as an educator "using his/her power to punish, manipulate or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure" (Marraccini, Weyandt, and Rossi, 2015, p. 563). Also included in the defining of educator bullying was saying hurtful things to a student on their character or ability, making obscene gestures, neglecting the student, gossiping about the student, and hurting the student physically. The researchers realized educator bullying was being overlooked in literature which warranted their study in this matter.

The study was conducted across many different majors which gave a broader range of educator's students were exposed to. Half of the participants reported seeing another student being bullied by an educator; whereas, only 18% reported being bullied themselves. Very few students reported that an attempt was made to stop the act of bullying when it was happening. This study showed how bullying is taking place in higher educator by educators, yet little is being done to properly address the issue (Marraccini, Weyandt, and Rossi, 2015).

ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Beginning in the 1990s, online classrooms and learning began to grow rapidly in adult basic education. This allows students to work remotely whether students are located in a distant area, have transportation limitations, or is convenience to the student. This type of classroom set up can be beneficial to a college or university by not having to have additional classrooms available due to increase instruction need. This helps with budgeting by generating more revenue through increased student enrollment and reach more students beyond its local network (Johnson-Bailey, 2016).

One can believe that online classrooms remove biases that take place in face-to-face classrooms. These biases can include racism, sexism, homophobia, and other societal issues. Research has shown that these biases are still part of this classroom environment with students being less tolerate of others (Johnson-Bailey, 2016). Through interaction in discussion boards or messaging within the course, interaction still takes place in the online classroom revealing these biases.

Cyberbullying. Luker (as cited in Luker & Curchack, 2017) found that administration and educators do not feel prepared to handle reports of cyberbullying at a personal or institutional level. Almost half of the participants in the study stated the college or university did not have an official policy on cyberbullying. Luker and Curchack took Luker's original study and replicated it with a more diverse sample size of 1,587 participants from seven different countries. The new study found cyberbullying was an international problem in higher education. The effects of this type of bullying had lasting negative effects. Almost half of the participants reported being involved or witnessing cyberbullying in the last twelve months. Of those participants, only 10% felt they were prepared to handle a cyberbullying attack (Luker & Curchack, 2017).

When looking at cyberbullying, students are not the only victims in this interactive, online classroom setting. Educators can experience this by supervisors, administrators, staff, fellow instructors, or students (Piotrowski & King, 2016). A study by Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson (as cited in Piotrowski & King, 2016) found that 17% of educators experienced this type of bullying over their prior year of teaching at one college. Then, they conducted another study involving 56 facilities which revealed a 39% claim of cyberbullying (Piotrowski & King, 2016). This type of cyberbullying can include email communication between the educators or with educators and administration.

VICTIM'S RESPONSE

Research has looked at how victims react to the bullying they encounter, and it was revealed that victims seek different responses to offset the unwanted

behavior. First, the victim can try and find a way to resolve the issues they are having. This can be done by seeking help of others or trying to change their environment, so they are less threatened. Even though a victim may seek help, support may not be able to be found or help. Second, they can choose a less functional way to react, but still staying in the victimizing role. Lastly, the victim may have destruction functioning that is harmful to themselves and cause permeant damage (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014).

PREVENTION

Meriläinen, Puhakka, & Sinkkonen (2015) studied bullying in higher education using different countries as their sample population. They found a patterned in many countries that divided their prevention planning into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The primary level focused on preventing the unwanted behavior in advance. The schools tried to create an environment that does not accept bullying in any circumstance and increase awareness on campus. Secondary prevention focused on the bullies and the victims. It taught social skills and offered counselling as needed. Finally, the tertiary prevention level was focused on individuals who showed problematic behavior. This would include students who showed antisocial or aggressive behavior with therapy and rehabilitation offerings (Meriläinen, Puhakka, & Sinkkonen, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Since there is not an abundant amount of research in this topic area, there can be additional areas for discussion. Future research can be looked at to fill in multiple gaps when looking at bullying in higher education. Bullying in this area holds different pathways that researchers can take to seek ways to help prevent this unwanted behavior and help victims understand how to handle this.

HIGHER EDUCATION EMPLOYEES

There are limited research studies on bullying in higher education on employees. This could be because of the structuring of colleges and universities. A top-down structure is seen here where people in higher roles make the decisions for everyone (Piotrowski & King, 2016). Mourssi-Alfash (as cited in Piotrowski & King, 2016) studied how faculty and staff were bullying at a university in the Midwest United States. His findings showed around 35%-45% of employees and staff reported some type of bullying in the workplace. With research showing

bullying is happening in the workplace, a further research is warranted in higher education to prevent this from happening.

STUDENT DIVERSITY

Bullying is commonly expressed as being less frequent in higher education. This generalization could be in part due to the lack of research in the subject matter. Students in higher education get to choose their path of success. Current studies have just study certain groupings or majors in higher education. Future research should be multidisciplinary, so more diverse grouping of students are included in the studies (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). It is important to know in what all areas students are being bullied. This could provide insight on areas that might need more prevention education in or to monitor future encounters. Once enough research has been conducted, one can know what is needed for what group of students and what the trends are on how bullying develops in higher education.

K-12 FOCUS

Education related to bullying has been focused on early and secondary education. Higher education should realize this is still a problem in this population including students, educators, and administration. Higher education should educate students and publicize information more openly. Student health services can play an active role for students and counselling could be available to everyone. It is alarming how bullying can create psychological symptoms when a victim is exposed to the negative effects of bullying (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). Bullying is a problem in all age groups and should be a focus in the future.

CYBERBULLYING

Johnson-Bailey (2016) developed three strategies for combating cyber bullying which includes prevention, intervention, and student reporting. First, posting protocols for online discussions can avoid undesired behavior in students. Second, it is important for educators to be a constant presence online and to immediately address any behavior that could be interpreted as bullying in any sort. Lastly, it is important to create an environment where students are comfortable reporting any type of behavior that is intimidating to them (Johnson-Bailey, 2016). These strategies can be utilizing in online learning, but educators must be aware of the possibilities and frequency of bullying acts. Incorporating information in the

syllabus and at the beginning of the course are ways to start the education upfront and hopefully prevent the intimidating behavior.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Research is still needed if the acts being categorized as bullying is intentional. A bully may not be realizing their behavior is being interpreted as bullying. Of course, this is not always the case, but could be a starting point for a study (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). Bullying is such a multifaced phenomenon because it is a personal experience someone is going through. This makes it hard sometimes to be able to effectively distinguish a bullying act compared to other claims (Meriläinen, Puhakka, & Sinkkonen, 2015). This can be why most studies are student's and educator's perception of bullying at the higher education level. Further research could expand on students who seek treatment for bullying or feel it is effectively them in a way to not function properly in the school setting.

CONCLUSION

Bullying is a serious problem for numerous of reasons, but it is still on an individual basis. It is based on individual experiences and how a person understands exactly what bullying entails (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). The research shows that bullying is not just a childhood problem and continues into the higher education realm. Knowing the types of bullying can educate others on when an act of bullying is taking place. Bullying can take place between many different people, yet the severity of the problem is one in the same. Higher education is now utilizing the online classroom approach more often and cyberbullying should always be looked at as situation. Knowing how victim's response to acts of bullying, it is crucial for research to act on this matter. Some colleges and universities have already placed prevention actions in place. This is only effective if others follow in this area of prevention.

While going through the literature, almost all studies suggest the need for more studies in this issue. Many studies use the same researches and cite the same pervious researchers who their studies are based off of. It is hard to find diversity within this small pool of research studies. Most studies used questionnaires because it is hard to use other means when bullying is such a personal account of a behavior. One should not feel intimidated or belittled in the education realms because of bullying. The need for future research is expressed greatly in this matter and how it can help prevent bullying and combat existing claims.

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