The Effectiveness of an Anti-Bullying Intervention: 
Take a Stand Against Bullying

Exploratory Findings

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Overview
Using an investigator-developed measure called “Test Your Bully IQ,” pre- and post-test data were gathered on secondary students throughout Western Washington schools (10 school districts and approximately 80 classrooms) in grades 6 through 12 from the end of 2001 through 2003. The survey is comprised of six questions (1 to 6) that examine the victim’s side of the bullying dynamic, whereas questions 7 to 12 explore the bully’s perspective. The remaining questions ask about the respondents’ fear about becoming a victim of bullying (question 13), bystanders’ intervention during bullying events (questions 14 to 16), and whether the bullying against the respondent was perpetrated largely by a boy or a girl.

Because of confidentiality limitations imposed on the investigator by the students’ respective schools, respondents’ surveys were not coded in such a way that would allow her to clearly determine which students had completed both pre- and post-tests. As such, this report does not include inferential comparisons between students’ survey scores over time. However, descriptive statistics for the students’ pre- and post-test results are presented below. In addition, several exploratory comparisons are reported below, examining differences among students’ post-test scores across salient demographic categories (e.g., gender).

The curriculum used as the anti-bullying intervention, “Take a Stand Against Bullying,” (TASAB) was developed principally by Michelle Bennett and Jessica Sullivan (see Appendix).

Results
Pre-test. Nearly 1400 \((N = 1386)\) students were respondents to the survey, with the majority (about 92%) ranging in age from 11 to 14 years and in grades 6 to 8 (about 82%). The gender split was virtually identical (boys 50.4%, girls = 49.1%, not identified = .5%). The predominate ethnicity who responded to the pre-test survey were white European Americans (51%), with minority students comprising approximately 34% of the pre-test group. The remaining proportion of students was not identified.

Post-test. Over 835 students \((N = 837)\) completed the post-test. Similar to the pre-test, about 97% respondents were either 11, 12, 13, or 14 years of age. Fifty-six percent of the students were European American and 96% were in grades 6 to 8. Approximately 51% of the post-test respondents were male (49% female).
Results by survey question. The results for the most important survey questions are summarized below. Key questions were also depicted in the Appendix. Finally, a representative sample of middle school students’ comments following the intervention curriculum is presented.

Victimization Questions

Question 1 addressed the perceptions of verbal abuse from the viewpoint of the victim during bullying. Approximately 14% of the students before the intervention indicated that they were either “often” or “very often” verbally abused. After the intervention, this percent dropped slightly, to 12.5%. (See Appendix for pre-and post-test charts.)

Question 2 explored whether the victim suffered any ethnic or racial abuse during bullying incidents. Previous to the intervention, about 15% of the students indicated that they experienced, at least sometimes, this type of bullying. The proportion decreased somewhat to about 11% after the anti-bullying education. (See Appendix for pre-and post-test charts.)

Question 4 looked at whether the student-victim experienced physical abuse during bullying events. On the pre- and the post-tests, approximately 17% of the students reported they, at least sometimes, had been physically bullied.

Questions 5 and 6 targeted the students’ feelings about whether they felt at least sometimes excluded following bullying experiences and if they thought other students were gossiping about them as victims, respectively. For both questions, the percentages (Question 5, pre- and post-test 15%; Question 6, pre-test 23.5%, post-test 23.1%) showed little change from pre- to post-test.

Gender differences were minimal to modest across the “victim” pre-test and post-test survey questions. The graphs are displayed in the Appendix (pp. 8-10).

Sample Qualitative Reflections from Victims:

"This really applied to me, ‘cause I had an instance of this recently."

"It will help me stand up for others. And for myself."

"It showed that I get bullied A LOT more than one might think. It shows me that I’m not alone."

"You talked a lot about things that we go through every day."

"I can use the things that you said because I see people teased and I know how it feels so now I know how to stop it."

Bully Perceptions Questions

For questions 7 to 12, which focused on the bully’s perceptions of their abuse of victims, at best only modest changes occurred in percentages from pre- to post-testing. For example, question 7 looks at whether bullies admitted their verbal abuse. Prior to the anti-bullying intervention, 21% of the respondents disclosed, at least sometimes, that they verbally attacked their victims. After the intervention, this percentage dropped slightly to about 18.5%
On the pre-test (question 8), very few students (about 5.5%) reported that they committed racial/ethnic abuse at least sometimes. After the intervention, some improvement (7.5%) in reporting these abusive acts was indicated from the students’ post-test ratings.

Question 10 attempted to measure whether bullies would admit to their physical abuse of their victims. Prior to and following the classroom lessons, only about 12% to 13% of the students said they at least sometimes physically bullied others.

Students on question 11 were asked to rate if bullies confessed to excluding others. About 15% of the students on the pre-test perceived that bullies at least sometimes did this, while on the post-test only 12% indicated that bullies admitted to excluding their fellow students.

The results from question 12 suggest that bullies may have a difficult time admitting to gossiping about their victims. Only 8.5% of the students on the pre-test viewed bullies doing this at least some of the time. After the intervention, the percentages remained at around 13%.

Gender differences were very small to modest across the “bully” pre-test and post-test survey questions. The graphs are displayed in the Appendix (pp. 8-10).

Sample Qualitative Reflections from Bullies:
"I didn't realize some things I do are bullying and I will stop."

"I didn't know so many people are affected by bullying. I'll know how it affects people and not to do it."

"I will watch what I say from now on, and be very careful on what jokes I make and say."

"It will make me think about how I treat my peers. To be more conscious of my actions."

"I know what I can do now to prevent hurting people's feelings."

"They (the instructors) made me think differently. I'm one of those people who bully-but even though I make sure I'm kidding, now I feel bad. I learned my lesson."

Fear of Being Bullied Question

Question 13 attempted to ascertain whether the students were fearful of bullying in their schools. Prior to receiving the classroom lessons on bullying, about 19% of the respondents indicated that they were at least afraid sometimes. This percentage dropped fairly substantially to about 9% following the intervention. This decrease in fear ratings reflects an almost 55% improvement in the students' perceptions of school safety. (See Appendix for pre-and post-test charts.)

General Reflections about the TASAB curriculum:
"It could change the lifestyle of many students."

"I knew what bullying was but you presented it in a way that covered all aspects of it. It was great."
"I will recognize bullying, even if it’s minor, and will know the effects of it."

"I thought the material in the presentation was relevant to middle and high school happenings. It did a good job of informing, not accusing."

"It really made me think about why those school shootings happened."

"I will always remember what I learned. I'll always look back at it. It made me think differently."

"I hope we can make this a consistent lesson for our classes." (Teacher comment)

"Acknowledging these characteristics will help kids recognize their own actions." (Teacher comment)

**Key Outcomes and Suggestions for Subsequent Anti-bullying Activities**

Following the short but targeted anti-bullying intervention, several positive trends in student perceptions emerged.

- Students who saw themselves as victims felt less verbally abused and less racially/ethnically insulted by their bullies.

- Minimal gender differences were found across the questions. Both boys and girls tended to see boys as the perpetrators of bullying (see final graph in Appendix on p. 10, question 17).

- The most promising trend in the data involved the students’ fear perceptions. Before the intervention, about 19% of the students surveyed suggested that they were at least sometimes fearful of being bullied. Following the intervention, this “fear level” diminished to about 9% of the student respondents. This finding suggests that overall, students tended to feel safer in their schools after the anti-bullying intervention, especially as it relates to the fear of experiencing bullying.

- As the anti-bullying intervention is further refined, it is important that the activities extend out over a longer period of time. While noticeable changes in student perceptions were found, these student attitudes may vary substantially after a more fully implemented anti-bullying program lasting up to eight weeks is instituted. Not surprisingly, the intervention should target the perceptions of the bully. It appears from these data that the perpetrators’ attitudes are more difficult to modify using a relatively short intervention.
Appendix

Pre-test Question 1. Victim verbally abused
- Very Often: 7.0%
- Often: 27.6%
- Sometimes: 6.6%
- Seldom: 22.8%
- Never: 31.2%
- Don't Know/Refused to Say: 4.0%

Post-test Question 1. Victim verbally abused
- Very Often: 6.2%
- Often: 18.8%
- Sometimes: 6.3%
- Seldom: 5.1%
- Never: 26.0%
- Don't Know/Refused to Say: 35.1%
Pre-test Question 2. Victim racially/ethnically abused

- Very Often: 10.2%
- Often: 2.0%
- Sometimes: 2.9%
- Seldom: 17.5%
- Never: 62.3%
- Don't Know/Refused: 3.8%

Post-test Question 2. Victim racially/ethnically abused

- Very Often: 6.8%
- Often: 3.0%
- Sometimes: 1.6%
- Seldom: 16.4%
- Never: 64.6%
- Don't Know/Refused: 3.8%
Pre-test Question 13. How afraid of bullying are you?

Post-test Question 13. How afraid of bullying are you?

Note. Across each of the questions above (pre- and post-test), many students (e.g., for question 13 post-test nearly 60% on the post-test) did not answer it and, as such, absent data were coded as “missing”; the pie chart slices reflect only valid (nonmissing) responses.
Gender Comparison on Pre-test "Victim" Questions

Survey Questions

1. Victim verbally abused
2. Victim racially abused
3. Victim extorted
4. Victim physically abused
5. Victim excluded
6. Victim gossiped about

Gender Comparison on Pre-test "Bully" Questions

Survey Questions

7. Bully admits verbal abuse
8. Bully admits racial abuse
9. Bully admits extortion
10. Bully admits physical abuse
11. Bully admits excluding
12. Bully admits gossiping
Gender Comparison on Post-test "Victim" Questions

Survey Questions

Mean

Boys
Girls

1. Victim verbally abused
2. Victim racially abused
3. Victim extorted
4. Victim physically abused
5. Victim excluded
6. Victim gossiped about

Gender Comparison on Post-test "Bully" Questions

Survey Questions

Mean

Boys
Girls

7. Bully admits verbal abuse
8. Bully admits racial abuse
9. Bully admits extortion
10. Bully admits physical abuse
11. Bully admits excluding
12. Bully admits gossiping
Gender Differences Across Victim and Bullying Questions and No. 17

Survey Questions

Means

- Pre-test Male
- Pre-test Female
- Post-test Male
- Post-test Female

1. Victim verbally abused
2. Victim racial abused
3. Victim extorted
4. Victim physically abused
5. Victim excluded
6. Victim gossiped about
7. Bully admits verbal abuse
8. Bully admits racial abuse
9. Bully admits extortion
10. Bully admits physical abuse
11. Bully admits excluding
12. Bully admits gossiping
17. Bullied by boys or girls
Program Overview

Take a Stand Against Bullying
A Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Curriculum

Sergeant Michelle Bennett and Deputy Jessica Sullivan
Shoreline Police Department

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Introduction

"To prevent bullying, educators need to do nothing less than change school culture, the social environment in which learning takes place." J. David Hawkins

Without question, bullying is a prominent issue in schools across the country. While there are a myriad of options for dealing with bullying in the school environment, research has consistently shown that the most effective means of addressing bullying is through a comprehensive, school wide approach. New Zealand researcher Kenneth Rigby found that programs that teach students to recognize and intervene in bullying incidents have the greatest impact on curbing incidents of bullying and harassment in schools.

Take a Stand Against Bullying was designed to help students, teachers and parents change the culture within their schools that has traditionally allowed bullying behavior to occur. Using a combination of PowerPoint presentations, discussions, assignments, activities, books and games, students will learn simple definitions of bullying as well as concrete examples of how it occurs and what they can do to intervene. The curriculum uses common language throughout and progressively builds on knowledge acquired at lower grade levels.

The program includes the following components:

- Elementary Lessons (Kindergarten, Grades 1 & 2, Grades 3 & 4, and Grade 5 & 6)
- Middle School Lesson (Grades 7 & 8)
- High School Lesson (Grades 9-12)
- Bully Intervention
- Target Intervention
- Teacher/Staff Training
- Parent Education
- Sample Policy
- Evaluation Surveys