

Self-Esteem and Its Effect on Bullying Behaviour

by

Lisa A. Shideler

A Literature Review

Presented to the Gordon Albright School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

EGC640 School Counselling Project

December, 2015

Self-Esteem and Its Effect on Bullying Behaviour

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beverly Ogilvie".

(Faculty Advisor)

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ardley".

(Principal of Canadian Programs)

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the support of my faculty supervisor Beverly Ogilvie for helping and supporting me through the writing of this paper. She was always there to offer suggestions and answer any questions I may have had during the process. Additionally, I could not have completed this paper or this program without the support of my family. Thank-you for everything you have done for me and for all the times you have supported me with encouraging words. I love you all.

Abstract

The issue of bullying has been one that has gained a lot of attention in the recent years. With technology allowing for continued harassment among teens, not limited to the school grounds, bullying appears to continue to be on the rise. The realization of this has prompted many prevention and intervention bullying programs. Despite these school-wide programs, bullying continues to be an issue. This literature review looks at the relationship between self-esteem and bullying behaviour. There appears to be conflicted results to date about whether or not self-esteem is connected to bullying behaviour. Some results showed relationship between bullying behaviour and low self-esteem, high self-esteem, mixed results and no relationship. Much of the research also appears to be done a number of years ago. This paper looks at the research that has been done to date, the limitations involved in the studies and where future research should be directed to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and bullying behaviour.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Chapter I: The Problem.....	1
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	6
Relationship Between High Self-Esteem and Bullying.....	6
Relationship Between Low Self-Esteem and Bullying.....	10
Studies Showing Mixed Results with the Relationship to Self-Esteem and Bullying.....	16
Studies Showing No Relationship Between Self-Esteem & Bullying.....	19
Summary.....	20
Chapter III.....	21
References.....	26

Self-Esteem and Its Effect on Bullying Behaviour

Chapter 1

The Problem

Bullying has become a highly discussed issue in the education systems and media in the recent years. With the advancing technology that children are having access to, the availability of various methods by which children are victimizing one another appears to be drastically increasing. Much effort in research and in schools has been dedicated to focusing on the victim of bullying behaviour. Researchers have studied various topics related to the likelihood of one being a victim to bullying behaviour, traits that victims possess, how to help individuals to reduce the amount of victimization they encounter and implications for the victim's future. One of the common topics discussed in bullying research is the self-esteem of an individual being a factor in the likelihood that they will be victimized. With so much focus on the self-esteem of the victim, there is a surprisingly small amount of research that has been dedicated to studying the self-esteem of the bully.

According to PrevNet that compiled data from over 28 universities and 100 researchers, 75% of people say they have been affected by bullying (Bullying: The Facts, 2014). With cyberbullying on the rise, 1 in 5 children report being victimized electronically. The research indicates that children who are bullied suffer increased headaches, anxiety, depression and a higher risk of suicide. Children who bully have also been shown to have an increased chance of involvement in criminal activity, with 60% of males who bully in schools having a criminal record by the time they are 24 years old.

The issues with bullying among children and youth have not been ignored. Due to the increase of victimization among children and youth, various intervention programs have tried to

raise awareness of bullying in schools and with youth. Educators have increased the education they are providing, especially in recent years, around cyberbullying. Outside agencies have also provided intervention services and resources for children whom are either victims or perpetrators of bullying. The website Stopabully.ca allows children to anonymously report a bully and receive adult intervention without the fear of being a target or facing victimization themselves. Other anti-bullying strategies have been implemented as well. Pink Shirt Day was created to allow students, educators, parents and other individuals to stand-up against bullying in an attempt to raise enough awareness to reduce its occurrence or eliminate it completely. Despite all of these efforts, bullying remains an issue among children and teens.

One concern that has been mentioned in the research compiled by PrevNet is that peers are present in 90% of bullying situations, but often children are not intervening or telling an adult. Research has shown that bystanders give the bully power and social status, which then in turn can cause others to learn this negative way of interacting with peers in order to gain power and control. The question that appears to be overlooked in a lot of research is why the bullying behaviour begins in the first place and what the reason is for needing this social status and power among their peers.

While it has been widely documented that victims of bullying demonstrate feeling low self-esteem due to victimization and in many cases have low self-esteem prior to victimization, it has been much less documented how or if the self-esteem of the bully is a factor in the victimization occurring. The purpose of this capstone is to focus on and compile research focusing on the self-esteem of the bully. The question that will guide this literature review is whether self-esteem affects the likelihood and frequency of participating in bullying behaviour. A working hypothesis is that low self-esteem could be related to participation in bullying behaviours.

This topic has much significance and relevance to a variety of people and systems. Beginning with the parents, acknowledging that low self-esteem in their child could contribute to participation in bullying behaviour, may enable parents to focus much time and effort on their child's self-esteem. Although parents often have the best of intentions with supporting their child's development and helping them to develop a positive self-esteem, this knowledge could impact their parenting and shift their focus accordingly to building positive self-esteem in their child. Furthermore, if the parents were able to pair this knowledge with practical strategies to implement, there may be a reduced risk of bullying behaviour occurring in the schools among children and youth.

This information would also have a significant impact on the education system. Part of the Planned Learning Outcomes for the British Columbia Curriculum is to focus on character building, and often many teachers discuss issues such as bullying with their students. The knowledge that self-esteem is a factor in victimization would be of significance in an attempt to prevent victimization from occurring. Additionally, these teachers would also be able to intervene when noticing a child with bullying tendencies and create a plan to assess and increase their self-esteem level, if necessary.

Additionally within the school system, this information would be useful for counsellors in elementary, middle and high school settings. As these professionals often work with students experiencing various behaviour and emotional issues, the knowledge that self-esteem directly correlates with bullying behaviour would be of utter importance. Counsellors would be better equipped to work with their clients in the schools and also educate parents of children needing extra support in how they can work to reduce this behaviour. Counsellors outside of the school setting would also find this information helpful in their practice.

This study is also of significance to those creating anti-bullying campaigns and programs to be used with children and youth. With this new knowledge, they may be able to better create the programs to target those at risk for bullying behaviour. They would be able to shift their focus from a current focus on standing-up to bullies and fighting to curb bullying to concrete knowledge on how to target these children at risk.

It is important to emphasize that there are many factors that may contribute to bullying, including sociocultural, historical and other various factors. One article, “Examining the Social Context of Bullying Behaviours in Early Adolescence” looks at the association between bullying behaviour and family and adult influences, peer influences and other variables. They found that gender influenced the likelihood of participating in bullying behaviour as male students reported higher rates of bullying behaviour (Eroglu S., Toprak S., Urgan O, MD, Ozge E. Onur, MD, Arzu Denizbasi, MD, Haldun Akoglu, MD, Cigdem Ozpolat, MD, Ebru Akoglu, 2012).

For the purpose of this paper, self-esteem is defined by www.dictionary.com as a favourable impression of oneself. A bully is defined as someone who frequently harasses and intimidates others, often targeting those weaker or smaller than themselves.

This paper will compile various research studies that have been completed to determine what has been discovered on the topic, what studies contradict each other or support the question at hand and where further research needs to be done. By compiling the research, professionals will have a better understanding of where to conduct further research and gain knowledge on how to better educate children and families on bullying to reduce or stop the behaviour.

Bullying behaviour is a very relevant topic in today’s schools, with it occurring at a higher rate than previously due to increased technology. It is the goal of this paper to review the literature that has been compiled on the effect of self-esteem on bullying behaviour in order to

intervene on many levels. Chapter two will offer a review of the literature related to this topic, while Chapter 3 will focus on where researchers could direct future research.

Chapter 2

Review of literature

Chapter 2 offers a review of the recent literature that has been published on the relationship of self-esteem to bullying behaviour. The question that will be focused on is whether self-esteem affects the likelihood and frequency of participating in bullying behaviour.

Bullying is a familiar term in today's society. In recent years, it has been frequently discussed and interventions have been put in place in an attempt to reduce and eliminate bullying behaviour. Much research has been conducted focusing on the victim of bullying and how victimization affects their self-esteem. Recent advancement of technology and accessibility to various forms of it have created opportunities for children to engage in bullying behaviour more frequently, in many environments beyond school

With bullying intervention programs failing to solve the problem, research has been conducted on various reasons as to why bullying exists and how to better intervene. This paper will review the literature that is currently available on whether self-esteem impacts the likelihood that one will participate in bullying behaviour. The findings in this review are controversial in regards to whether self-esteem is correlated with the victimization of others. This review will outline literature showing no relationship between self-esteem and bullying behaviours, a relationship between higher self-esteem and bullying behaviour, a relationship between lower self-esteem and bullying behaviour, as well as studies that found mixed results.

Relationship Between High Self-Esteem and Bullying

The study "Do You Like What You See? Self-Perceptions of Adolescent Bullies" published in 2006 addressed whether or not there are significant differences in self-concept and

self-esteem in adolescents displaying bullying behaviour compared to other adolescents of the same age and in the same school who did not display bullying characteristics (Johnson & Lewis, 2006). The study used 245 participants who were 14 and 15 years old who were from 3 different schools including an all boys' school, an all girls' school and one that was mixed genders. The schools all had different bullying policies and ways of enforcing them in the school. The study used a self-report method to determine who the bullies in the school were, indicating determining these students can be a very challenging and complex process. The students completed the "Life at School Checklist," originally designed to identify victims of bullying, which was identified by the authors as an "indirect but more precise measure of bullying" (Johnson & Lewis, 2006, p. 668) since it focuses on specific actions. Additionally, the checklist was modified to be more suitable to this study only attempting to identify bullies.

The findings of this study are that boys tend to bully three times more often than girls. Most of the young people exhibiting bullying behaviour in this study, particularly the boys, had a relatively positive view of themselves in terms of social competence and self-esteem, even though there was a negative correlation between high scores on the bullying behaviour and low self-concept in the cognitive domain. (Johnson & Lewis, 2006, p. 671)

The study suggests that young people are not aware of or do not care about the effect they have on others, or that they enjoy the power, as I will indicate below. Bullies viewed themselves as being very likeable. The reason for bullies having a positive self-image in the study is unknown but the authors claim it may be attributed to being exposed to a dysfunctional, aggressive family life where this type of behaviour has been viewed as normal.

Children who participated in this study had a generally positive view of themselves, including those involved in bullying behaviours. Children who bullied also scored positivity on

their view of their self-worth. This study concluded that, “the generally positive self-concept of these young people implies that they see their behaviour as acceptable or that they are confident enough to not care” (Johnson & Lewis, 2006, p. 672). The study found bullies had average to good self-esteem and average to good perceived social competence.

This study is not without limitations that they address. One of the limitations that this study has is the checklist that was used. The checklist uses a fairly narrow view of bullying, primarily focusing on physical bullying. Additionally, it claims that the validity of the items in relation to bullying is a concern. They claim that if additional research was to be done to extend this study, it would be useful to focus on the “validity of the items against notions of bullying that exist in the community, i.e., the perceptions of parents, teachers and peers” (Johnson & Lewis, 2006, p. 668). The cut off point for the questionnaire they claim is also arbitrary since they simply cut it off at “more than once” for participating in a bullying behaviour.

There are other limitations that should be noted about this study but were not addressed. First, this study only used grade 10 students so due to lack of variance of ages, this could provide limited results only specific to this age group. Additionally, because the checklist was a self-report checklist paired with the cut off that was assigned for determining bullying behaviour, the results could be flawed given that students might not have responded honestly.

Another study by Johnson and Lewis confirms similar results. The article titled “Bullying and Victimization: Prevalence and Relationship to Gender, Grade-Level, Ethnicity, Self-Esteem and Depression” described research on a sample of 454 students aged 12-17 taken from 5 school districts in the northern Delta region, from both urban and suburban and rural areas (Seals & Young, 2003). Fairly equal number of boys and girls participated in the study but it was limited to primarily Caucasian and African American children.

This study used 3 different instruments to gather data relating to bullying behaviour, depression and self-esteem. To measure self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) was used.

The findings of this study also showed more boys participating in victimization of others than girls. When looking at the results of this study in terms of self-esteem, although bullies, victims and non-bully/non-victims did not show large differences, the bullies had the highest self-esteem of the three groups. The study did note, however, that those who participated in bullying and were also victims had the lowest self-esteem. Their explanation for this is that bullies were generally more popular in school and therefore had high self-esteem; those who were bullied viewed themselves as not being popular in school had lower self-esteem (Seals & Young, 2003, p. 745).

This study supports the previous research, which claimed that those with high self-esteem were more likely to bully others. There are also limitations of this research to consider. First, the sample for this study was primarily African American and Caucasian children. It is important to consider that the ethnicity and culture of the students involved may hinder the generalizability to other populations. Because students of different upbringings may have witnessed or been exposed to different ideas and norms around self-esteem and bullying, there could be different results with a research sample that has more variety.

Another important consideration to be made is the scale used to evaluate the level of self-esteem of the participants. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which was created in 1965, is somewhat outdated and perhaps unsuitable as a relevant scale. However, it has been successfully used in many studies demonstrating good validity and reliability.

One more limitation that must be considered is the self-assessment that the students conducted on themselves. First, similar to the previous study that used self-assessment, the results are based on the answers given, which may not be accurate accounts of the frequency and extent of the bullying behaviour participated in. The self-assessment requires students to be very honest in order for it to provide accurate results and due to the nature of the questions, students may be inclined to not answer honestly. A positive to note, however, is that the study kept the students anonymous which likely allowed for more honest answers.

The evaluation itself has another limitation. The questionnaire asks the students to evaluate whether they participate in bullying behaviour “Never”, “Sometimes” or “Often”. With very subjective terms, it may be difficult for students to accurately judge where their behaviour falls on the questionnaire. It may have been helpful to have a scale for them to refer to that specifies what answer to choose. For example, “If you have participated in teasing someone 1-3 times in the last month, check “sometimes” on the questionnaire.”

Relationship Between Low Self-Esteem and Bullying

The study “Understanding Bullying and Victimization During Childhood and Adolescence: A Mixed Methods Study” assessed the relationship between “self-esteem, normative beliefs about bullying and perceived school climate and both bullying and victimization” (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011, p. 298). The study had 2678 participants chosen from elementary, middle school and high school from 59 different schools. Additionally, this study had 14 focus groups with 115 participants who did not participate in the survey.

The survey data of this study, “suggested that bullying is associated with low self-esteem, normative endorsement of bullying and negative school climate for both genders during the

upper elementary, middle and high school years” (Guerra et al., 2011, p. 303). Additionally, in more than half the focus groups, youth mentioned emotional problems such as low self-esteem as an important cause of bullying. The focus groups also explored the reasons this could be the case, stating these students had been bullied before in their lives so they in turn want to bully others. It should be noted however, that some focus group participants did mention that some bullies have high self-esteem and think they are better than everyone else. This could however be again due to low self-esteem that the bully is attempting to cover up by feigning confidence. The students also mentioned that peer pressure to engage in bullying could be a factor, as well, as they may get bullied themselves if they do not participate. Overall, the results of this study indicated that “over the course of the school year, changes in both bullying and victimization were predicted in by declines in self-esteem” (Guerra et al., 2011, p. 306).

This research study took many precautions in order to ensure generalizability to the general public, and therefore more accurate results. First, the large sample offered more accurate results. Additionally, the sample had random selection of participants of various ages, ethnicities and backgrounds who were chosen with help from the school counsellor in order to ensure a variety of students with varying levels of experience with bullying. Furthermore, this study added a qualitative approach, allowing for more in-depth discussion and evaluation of possible reasons for survey answers collected in the other part of this study.

Although many preventative factors were taken in this study, there are a few limitations to address. First, the study only took place over one school year, which is not long enough to allow for careful exploration of developmental factors that could play a role over the course of the school years. Additionally, although there were students selected as potential participants from elementary, middle and high school, the participants ended up being all from the older

grades in the school and therefore not representative of all grades and ages. Also, although focus groups can offer great insight in this study, there is also the chance that answers could be biased or based on appearing socially desirable with the other peers in the group. This study also uses the same scale for self-esteem as the previous study. Overall, this appears to be a strong study since many precautions were addressed in order to ensure generalizability and reproducibility of the results.

“Bully/Victim Problems Among Middle School Children” finds similar results to the previous study, notably the relationship between low self-esteem and bullying behaviour (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). This article contains two studies that were done to gather data and to understand reasons why bullying might occur. The first study used a sample of 296 children from urban middle schools in the United Kingdom. Twelve classes, including two younger and two older classes in each school, participated in the study. This study also used a questionnaire for the students to complete. For the purpose of this capstone, the first study will not be addressed in-depth, as it does not directly relate to the question at hand.

The second study included 122 participants aged 8-10. Among these students, there were equal numbers of children who were labelled as bullies, victims and non-involved children. The data in this study were collected by interviewing the participants on their opinions towards bullying and the reasons why they believe it occurs. The most notable results from this study indicate that of those students who admitted to bullying, 25% admitted doing so to make them feel better about themselves, indicating lower self-esteem as a contributing factor to participation in bullying behaviour.

It should be noted that this study only utilized students from middle school and therefore is a limitation to the results. Additionally, participants were primarily Asian and Caucasian, not offering a large variety of varying backgrounds limiting the generalizability to the public.

O'Moore and Kirkham (2001) conducted a study titled "Self-Esteem and its Relationship to Bullying Behaviour." The objective of the study was to "elucidate further understanding of the relationship between self-concept and bullying behaviour" (p. 269). This study had a very large sample size of 8,248 students ranging from 8-18 years old, taken from 26 counties in Ireland, who were required to complete two questionnaires regarding bullying and self-concept. Unlike the other studies reviewed here that used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, this study used a much newer assessment known as the Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale to assess how the participants felt about themselves. Definitions of bullying were explained to the students, which serves as a positive measure in this study.

This study found that children who bullied "also perceived themselves as less well-behaved, to have lower intellectual and school status and to be less popular than children not involved in bullying" (Moore & Kirkham, 2001, p. 270). "When all the children who stated that they bullied others were placed into a single category, children of both primary and post-primary school age were found to have significantly lower global self-esteem scores than children who had not bullied others (Moore & Kirkham, 2001, p. 273). Results also showed the students who had both bullied others and been a victim had the lowest self-esteem of all the participants and had significantly more feelings of inadequacy. The study also found that there is relationship between the frequency of the victimization and bullying behaviour and the level of self-esteem. The more frequent the abuse, the lower the self-esteem (Moore & Kirkham, 2001, p. 281).

The limitations of this study include that it did not take into account gender differences, as some research in the past has stated a difference between genders, self-esteem and bullying. Additionally, this study as well relied on self-assessment of bullying and self-esteem so it therefore may not be entirely accurate as if the results were taken using another method. This study overall seems very strong as a lot of factors were considered when creating the method. Although there are limitations, it seems the study would have reproducibility and generalizability if done again.

Differences in Predictors of Traditional and Cyber-Bullying: A 2 Year Longitudinal Study in Korean School Children found similar findings (Yang et al., 2013). This two-year study was conducted on 1,344 ten-year-old children from five different primary schools and attempted to analyze predictors of bullying behaviour. In relation to self-esteem and bullying, this study found that “ Lower self-esteem was associated with both perpetration of and victimization from cyber-bullying ... lower self-esteem only being associated with perpetration of and victimization from cyber-bullying, and not predictive of traditional bullying” (Yang et al., 2013, p. 316).

A positive of this study is that it had two questionnaires filled out regarding each child and therefore they were able to gain more information to hopefully provide more insightful information for the study. Additionally, the fairly large sample is a strength.

There are some limitations to this study. While the study sample was large, it only contained students who were ten years old. Due to this, it is difficult to say whether the results apply to other age areas or are age specific. Additionally, the questionnaire completed at home should be questioned, due to the possible biases that the parents may have regarding their own child. Parents would possibly be more likely to rate their child favourably than someone else would in the areas on the assessment.

Patchin and Hinduja (2010) also conducted a study on the impacts of self-esteem and its relationship to bullying behaviour. The study “Cyberbullying and Self-Esteem” used 1,963 students from 30 different schools in the United States. This study used Rosenberg’s scale of self-esteem and the students had to complete the survey in class.

The study found that there was a “statistically significant relationship between both cyberbullying victimization and offending and self-esteem. More specifically, cyberbullying victims and offenders both had significantly lower self-esteem than those who had not been cyberbullying victims or offenders” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010, p. 618). The study did however find a stronger relationship between self-esteem and victimization compared to offending. The study did find lower self-esteem was more prevalent in males, non-white participants and older middle school students than their peers.

The study has strength in that its sample was taken randomly from the school populations, and therefore the results are considered to be more reliable and generalizable to the public. Additionally, this study also controlled for factors such as gender, race, and age. A possible limitation is that the study only focused on cyberbullying and therefore may not apply to all forms of bullying. Further research would have to be conducted in order to see if traditional bullying and cyberbullying were both affected similarly by self-esteem.

Turning to how the research showing a significant relationship between self-esteem and bullying behaviours impacts professional development, the article “Critical Issues for Teacher Training to Counter Bullying and Victimization in Ireland” addresses the need for training programs for teachers on bullying and victimization (O’Moore, 2000). The article reviews the findings on self-esteem, pointing out that there has been a correlation between low self-esteem and bullying discovered in previous research. O’Moore emphasizes the need for “heavy

emphasis in teacher training on how to prevent low self-esteem and how to enhance self-esteem. She claims that although the parents have a large role in the child's development of high self-esteem, the teacher's impact should not be downplayed. O'Moore claims that the teacher holds a critical role in shaping the child's view of themselves. The paper therefore speaks about how it is critically important that teachers receive training on how to enhance positive self-esteem.

O'Moore (2000) claims that due to the way that the education system is comprised and their work assessed, students have a constant reminder of their limitations and potential since they are constantly being evaluated (p. 106). Since not all children are able to benefit from a stable, supportive home environment, it is even more important teachers help students to feel adequate and successful in order to ensure they do not develop low self-esteem. She states her hopes that teachers will become the driving force in preventing bullying by addressing the issue of low self-esteem. She offers suggestions on how to handle bullying situations when they do arise, as the teachers are unlikely to prevent all bullying from occurring.

Studies Showing Mixed Results with the Relationship to Self-Esteem and Bullying

While some studies found a relationship between high self-esteem and bullying while others showed low self-esteem and bullying, some sources have shown the mixed results of a possible connection to both.

A literature review titled "Does High Self-Esteem Cause Better Performance, Interpersonal Success, Happiness, or Healthier Lifestyles?" (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), looked at various factors and their relationship to self-esteem. The summary of the findings conclude that some categories of self-esteem, such as defensiveness and narcissism are associated with higher levels of aggression. According to the research compiled in this review, a

certain type of “high self-esteem predicts being a bully and supporting a bully but a different category of high self-esteem predicts defending victims against bullies. There was some evidence to show, however, that low self-esteem may lead to delinquency” (p. 36).

Brito and Oliveira (2013) found in their study mixed results in regards to self-esteem and bullying behaviour. They completed a cross-sectional study on 237 ninth grade students who were randomly selected from various schools. The method consisted of the students completing questionnaires. The study found statistically significant results. It was found that those who were victims and aggressors as well as male aggressors have high self-esteem, while females showed low self-esteem. A possible explanation provided by this study is that it is related to different factors that influence self-esteem in the identify formation of males, compared to females who are driven by their feelings (p. 606). This study essentially found that self-esteem predicted bullying behaviour, but that gender ultimately was the largest predictor of whether they would be involved in victimizing others.

This study only used grade 9 students and it was, again, another questionnaire style data collection only completed by the student. Having multiple people complete the questionnaire on a child could offer more accurate results and offer insight that would be difficult or impossible to obtain otherwise. Additionally, it appears that there was a lack of control for the socio economic status or that the students used in this study were of a higher socio economic status. This therefore adds other possible factors that could skew the results. This study used mostly “black” students who lived with 4 or more people in homes they owned with 5 or more rooms. Due to the sample of participants, it could be helpful to conduct the study again with a more diverse sample to see if similar results were found.

The next study to be reviewed was completed in Taiwan and included a large sample size of 2,992 students from 26 different high schools who completed questionnaires. The study found that “ School bullying victims and bully-victims were more likely to have lower self-esteem and higher depression than either bullies or non-involved students” (Chang, F., Lee, C., Chui, C., Hsi, W., Huang, T., Pan, 2013, p. 458). Similarly, it was found that cyberbullying and school victims and bully/victims were statistically more likely to have much lower self-esteem than their peers that were not involved. The study also showed that cyber/school bullies who were not also victims did not have low self-esteem but instead had higher self-esteem than victims and bully/victims. The study addresses that this is inconsistent with other findings that claim that bullies who are not victims have low self-esteem. Therefore additional research is encouraged.

A strength of this study is that much time was spent to ensure reliability of the questionnaire being presented to the students for completion. It was reviewed by experts and also tested on two classes prior to the study to assess the responses given to the questions and make adjustments if necessary to ensure better reliability. This study had many strengths but unfortunately, also used only tenth grade students and because of that, did not have a very diverse range of applicability to other ages.

Another study, “Longitudinal Risk Factors for Cyberbullying in Adolescence” containing 835 seventh grade students who completed two surveys six months apart. This study found that, Neither gender nor global self-esteem was found to be associated with cyberbullying at t2 on a bivariate level. However, global self-esteem was found to be negatively associated with cyberbullying at t1. Our results therefore support those of Smith et al. (2008) and Patchin and Hinduja (2006), who also found no significant association between cyberbullying and gender, and are partly in line with those of Patchin and Hinduja

(2010), who found that cyberbullies had lower levels of self-esteem. (Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker, & Perren, 2012, p. 62).

This study has the advantage of being longitudinal, even if it was short. It allowed them to assess causal effects. Similar to the other studies, the limitation of the self-reporting is problematic.

Studies Showing No Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Bullying

While many studies have shown relationship between self-esteem and bullying, some have failed to find any correlation. The first study to be reviewed here was not conducted with children, but adults. The information however, could be helpful to consider as a basis for duplicating research in another setting.

This study, “Social Self-Esteem and Self-Reported Bullying Behaviour Among Adult Prisoners,” wanted to assess whether self-esteem was related to bullying behaviour. In this study, they found that self-esteem or certainty of their self-esteem did not seem to be related to bullying behaviour. There did not seem to be a relationship between self-esteem and the number of aggressive behaviours reported that were “indicative of bullying others or being bullied” (Ireland, 2002, p. 94). Small relationships were found between men and the “commanding and controlling” category on the assessments but these were very small. The study also suggests that being involved in a group such as a pure bully group, where they are not also victims, does not raise their self-esteem more than any other bully categories.

A limitation of this study is that it mainly focused on the social aspects of self-esteem and therefore it may not be directly comparable with other studies that look at multiple aspects of self-esteem. There are a number of limitations, in particular this review is not a study that was

completed on children and therefore may not be relevant. Additionally, it was completed on only prisoners so there may be many other factors involved with the results that could present data very different than might be visible in the study without prisoners.

Slee and Rigby conducted a study in 1993 that is worth mentioning for the purpose of this paper. *The Relationship of Eysenck's Personality Factors and Self-Esteem to Bully-Victim Behaviour in Australian Schoolboys* used students from 3 different primary schools ranging from age 7-13. In this study, Slee and Rigby did not use a questionnaire that was previously created, but instead created one of their own. The students had to be nominated by their teacher to participate and they had to have a certain score in order to begin the process of completing other psychology testing for the purpose of the study. It is stated that, "The findings in the present study that the bullies and 'normal' children could not be differentiated in terms of self-esteem suggests that the tendency to bully others is not associated with negative feelings about oneself" (Slee & Rigby, 1993, p. 372).

Summary

The findings on the relationship between self-esteem and bullying behaviour are quite controversial and much additional research must be completed to address these inconsistencies. It appears that the majority of the studies completed to address this question have concluded that low self-esteem contributes to bullying behaviour; however, a number of studies have found little or no correlation, while others conclude high self-esteem is related to bullying behaviours. It could be helpful to control for other factors in the studies that do not conclude this finding, to see if there are other factors present that are causing skewed results. It seems it is still uncertain as to whether self-esteem affects the likelihood and frequency of participating in bullying behaviour.

Chapter 3

Conclusions and Discussion

The previous chapter reviewed current research on the topic of whether self-esteem affects the likelihood and frequency of participating in bullying behaviour. While there have been various studies conducted and research compiled on this topic, there are very mixed and controversial results compiled that were presented in the previous chapter. While some studies found a positive relationship between low self-esteem and bullying behaviour, others found a high self-esteem was a greater predictor of victimizing others. Additionally, other research studies showed mixed results of this relationship, while others showed no relationship at all. The controversial findings demonstrate the need for additional studies. Further information on the relationship between self-esteem and the victimization of others is of interest to parents, counsellors and educators as a means of prevention and intervention. This study will attempt to determine whether high or low self-esteem is more likely to predict the participation in bullying behaviour or whether there is no relationship at all.

This chapter addresses the inconsistencies of the current research and serves as a starting place for advancement in the understanding around how or if self-esteem is correlated to bullying behaviour. The research study proposed in this chapter will aid in an attempt to fill the gaps in the research by addressing some of the limitations that may have skewed the results in the other study.

The previous studies were conducted in various locations but often only collected a sample of students from one school district or one city. Additionally, the number of schools participating was often limited, as well as the ages of the students participating. The previous studies also appeared to rely heavily on self-assessment. While a useful component for this type of topic,

self-assessment alone can be problematic when it is the only method used to collect data on the participants.

Research Proposal

The study proposed in this chapter is a correlational study examining the relationship between bullying behaviour and self-esteem. The study is to be conducted in elementary and secondary schools in all provinces and territories in Canada. This will allow for a better understanding of whether there is a relationship between these two factors since the study will be conducted on a larger scale.

Schools are to be selected by sending out a request for participation. From the schools that show interest in the study, schools will be randomly selected, ensuring both elementary and secondary schools from each province are selected. Consideration will be given to whether the schools are urban or rural in order to obtain a mix of both and a sample most reflective of the population. From the schools selected, a primary and intermediate class from each school will be randomly selected to participate. Permission forms will go home to the parents of the students requesting their permission to participate. The selection process of this study allows for reliability and validity of the study's findings.

This study will use the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to assess the level of self-esteem of the child. Even though this assessment tool was developed in 1965, there have been few scales that have been shown as valid for assessing self-esteem and Rosenberg's scale is highly respected. Additionally, the study will use a The Bullying and Health Experiences scale developed in 2012. I will then use it to determine the level of participation in bullying behaviour. The scale also contains questions about bullying victimization by other children

which I will also obtain information as a means of correlating the findings with previous research and findings.

After the selection of the schools and classes and students participating has been established, teachers will be provided with instructions for administering the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in the classroom. The teachers will give the instructions to the students, assure them that their information is confidential and encourage them to answer as honestly as possible. They will define any terms that are relevant to the questionnaire and answer any questions that the students have. The teacher will then administer the second self-assessment, the Bullying and Health Experiences Scale. Terms will be defined again as per that scale to ensure students understand definitions. The scales will not be labelled with the title and the teacher will be instructed to not use the word bullying when presenting the scales to the students for completion. The reasoning for this is the possible negative association the students may have made about bullying and not wanting to be associated with that title.

As well as the self-assessment of the Bullying and Health Experiences Scale completed by the participant, the teacher and parent of each child will complete the same scale, allowing for 3 assessments for each child. Having multiple assessments completed for each child allows for multiple people's perspectives, making the results more valid. Because self-esteem is an individual opinion of oneself, no one besides the child will assess their own level of self-esteem.

All of these assessments would be kept confidential. Parents would be required to fill out their checklist and return it in a sealed envelope, as to not influence the results from the teacher and the student themselves.

After the study has been completed, the results will be assessed to see if there is a correlation between the child's assessment of their self-esteem and the frequency with which it

was observed when they participated in bullying behaviour. Additional information including gender, age and school location will also be collected in the study and analyzed as well at this point to determine if there is indeed a more predictive factor to bullying than self-esteem. Since data will also be collected on the frequency of how often the participants were bullied, this information will also be analyzed for correlations to self-esteem and bullying behaviour as well.

While this possible potential study addresses a lot of the limitations that other studies do not address, it has its own limitations as well. Because the parents are filling out the forms at home, there is a chance that their child will see their responses and be influenced by the results. To ensure this does not happen, the Bullying and Health Experiences Scale filled out by the students should be completed before the checklist is sent home for the parents to fill-out. It should also be considered that the parent filling out the check-list may be less likely to rate the scale honestly due to their own bias.

With all the contradictions in the research to date, it is imperative that more research is conducted in order to discover if self-esteem influences the likelihood and frequency of participating in bullying behaviour. Other studies have suggested that different types of bullying may be connected to different types of self-esteem or that there is a gender component to consider. These are areas for further consideration in order to gain more insight into these topics.

After reviewing all of the research, it would be advised that parents and school educators focus on tackling all possible areas that could be contributing to bullying. For example, parents can focus on ensuring they are encouraging their children and giving positive reinforcement for their successes. They can also encourage them when they are not successful at completing a task by helping them to understand that individual differences make some things more challenging for some people than others. The acknowledgment that this is acceptable and the encouragement

to keep practicing to improve themselves may be important to the child's positive self-esteem. Also spending quality time with their children may help their child develop feelings of higher self-esteem and self-worth. If the child feels accepted, included and loved in their family dynamic, this may lead to a more positive self-esteem.

Because the cause of bullying is still controversial and there are many factors that may be involved, educators can continue with anti-bullying campaigns and programs to target bullying from different angles and perspectives. Educators can also aim to help students with low self-esteem by encouraging acceptance of differences whether that be in ability, race, religion or interests. Raising the awareness and acceptance of differences may encourage higher feelings of self-esteem.

School counsellors are encouraged to highlight prevention programs such as Second Step and Friends for Life to reduce anxiety, encourage positive relationships and social thinking. They will play a pivotal role in helping students to build self and social awareness particularly in the area of recognizing, understanding, expressing and regulating emotions.

As stated before, are still many questions in regards to bullying and its causes. Additional research must be conducted in various areas to determine any patterns, correlations or potential causations.

References

- Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). Does High Self-Esteem Cause Better Performance, Interpersonal Success, Happiness, or Healthier Lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(1), 1–44. doi:10.1111/1529-1006.01431
- Beran, T., Stanton, L., Hetherington, R., Mishna, F., & Shariff, S. (2012). Development of the Bullying and Health Experiences Scale. *Interactive Journal of Medical Research*, 1(2), e13. <http://doi.org/10.2196/ijmr.1835>
- Boulton, M. J., & Underwood, K. (1992). Bully/Victim Problems Among Middle School Children. *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 62(Pt 1), 73–87. doi:10.2753/EUE1056-4934250318
- Brito, C. C., & Oliveira, M. T. (2013). Bullying and self-esteem in adolescents from public schools. *Jornal de Pediatria*, 89(6), 601–607. doi:10.1016/j.jpmed.2013.04.001
- Chang, F., Lee, C., Chui, C., Hsi, W., Huang, T., Pan, Y. (2013). Relationships Among Cyberbullying, School Bullying, and Mental Health in Taiwanese Adolescents. *Journal for School Health*, 83(6), 454–462.
- Eroglu S., Toprak S., Urgan O, MD, Ozge E. Onur, MD, Arzu Denizbasi, MD, Haldun Akoglu, MD, Cigdem Ozpolat, MD, Ebru Akoglu, M. (2012). Examining the Social Context of Bullying Behaviours in Early Adolescence. *Saudi Med J*, 33, 3–8. doi:10.1073/pnas.0703993104
- Guerra, N. G., Williams, K. R., & Sadek, S. (2011). Understanding Bullying and Victimization During Childhood and Adolescence: A Mixed Methods Study. *Child Development*, 82(1), 295–310. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01556.x
- Ireland, J. L. (2002). Social self-esteem and self-reported bullying behaviour among adult prisoners. *Aggressive Behavior*, 28(3), 184–197. doi:10.1002/ab.90021
- Johnson, D., & Lewis, G. (2006). Do you like what you see? *Nature Physics*. doi:10.1038/nphys437
- Moore, M. O. & Kirkham, C. (2001). Self-Esteem and Its Relationship to Bullying Behaviour, *Aggressive Behavior*, 27(4), 269–283.
- O'Moore, M. (2000). Critical issues for Teacher Training to Counter Bullying and Victimization in Ireland. *Aggressive Behavior*, 26(1), 99–111. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337(2000)26:1<99::AID-AB8>3.0.CO;2-W
- Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2010). Cyberbullying and Self-Esteem. *Journal of School Health*, 80(12), 614–621. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2010.00548.x

- Seals, D., & Young, J. (2003). Bullying and victimization: Prevalence and relationship to gender, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression. *Adolescence*, *38*(152), 735-747.
- Slee, P., & Rigby, K. (1993). The Relationship of Eysenck's Personality Factors and Self-Esteem to Bully-Victim Behaviour in Australian Schoolboys. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *14*(2), 371-373.
- Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., & Perren, S. (2012). Longitudinal Risk Factors for Cyberbullying in Adolescence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *23*(October), 52-67. doi:10.1002/casp
- Yang, S. J., Stewart, R., Kim, J. M., Kim, S. W., Shin, I. S., Dewey, M. E., ... Yoon, J. S. (2013). Differences in predictors of traditional and cyber-bullying: A 2-year longitudinal study in Korean school children. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *22*, 309-318. doi:10.1007/s00787-012-0374-6