Research Base of Bully Proofing Your School

Amy Plog, Ph.D.

Creating Caring Communities

Schools today are increasingly asked to determine whether interventions they plan to implement are research and/or evidence based. This makes sense given that programs with a solid foundation in research and evidence of previous positive impact are more likely to be effective than programs without such a foundation (Elliott, 2006; Nation et al., 2003). Bully-Proofing Your School (BPYS) is based on information gathered from many years of research on bullying and has been shown to have a positive impact on bullying behaviors in schools.

Research on bullying interventions has demonstrated that several factors are necessary in order for these interventions to be effective. The first factors are assessment of bullying in the school paired with increased awareness of the dynamics of bullying (Olweus, 1997; Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003; Peterson & Rigby, 1999).The Colorado School Climate Survey (CSCS) was developed for BPYS in order to assess bullying behaviors, perceptions of safety, and overall school climate; BPYS trainings for students, staff, and parents include information bullying dynamics.

The school-wide, systemic approach as found in BPYS has also been identified as an important component of successful bullying interventions(Olweus, 1997; Orpinas et al., 2003; Stevens, Van Oost, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2000). Similarly, the establishment of rules and/or a policy regarding bullying (Eslea & Smith, 1998; Olweus, 1997; Orpinas et al., 2003; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1994) is also mentioned as a necessary (though not sufficient) component of effective bullying interventions and is addressed in BPYS through classroom rules and the adoption of a school-wide discipline plan that addresses bullying behaviors

The HA HA SO strategies of BPYS provides students with tools to become less attractive as victims, places emphasis on no-nonsense staff responses to bullies and the importance of support for victims, and includes supplemental interventions for victims and for bullies. Research has discussed to the importance of interventions for both bullies and victims (Eslea & Smith, 1998; Pepler et al., 1994; Stevens et al., 2000).

A final component identified by research as critical for effective bullying intervention is the involvement of peers, and not just the bully and the victim, in the intervention (Cowie, 2000; Orpinas et al., 2003; Pepler et al., 1994; Stevens et al., 2000). Peers are an important part of the dynamics of bullying for several reasons. Bullying is a problem that includes the bully and the victim, but is also impacted by the social environment in which bullying occurs (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Within this environment, other students and not adults are often the ones who are aware of the bullying (Pepler et al., 1994). Further, though students typically report they do not condone bullying behavior, they often behave in ways that exacerbate rather than diminish bullying (Salmivalli, 1999). BPYS includes lessons that teach strategies to students who are bystanders to the bullying. Further, the core of Bully-Proofing Your School is its emphasis on Caring Community development, which relies on the involvement of the entire peer community.

In addition to its solid foundation in research on effective bullying intervention, preliminary research has been conducted that more directly assesses the impact of Bully-Proofing Your School. Keyes, Berkey, and Longhurst (2001) interviewed over 200 students and school staff in schools where BPYS had been implemented. They found that the approaches of BPYS had a positive impact on discipline and behavior at the elementary, but not secondary level. A second study by Epstein and colleagues (2002) reported the results of a four-year longitudinal study of the impact of BPYS in a suburban elementary school. Significant decreases in bullying behaviors (physical, verbal, and exclusionary) and improved perceptions of safety across four school locations were found using time-lagged contrasts between equivalent groups (i.e., earlier time points served as controls for the later time points). A study by Beran and Tutty (2002) improved upon this methodology and included both an intervention (an adaptation of BPYS) and comparison school. They found significantly decreased reports of witnessed bullying in an intervention school, but not in a comparison school. They also found decreased positive attitudes towards victims in a comparison school, but not in an intervention school. This preliminary research provides initial support for the positive impact of the BPYS program at the elementary level. More solid support for this assertion comes from a more methodologically rigorous study of BPYS conducted by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. This study was done over the course of five years and included multiple intervention and comparison schools (Menard, Grotpeter, Gianola, & O'Neal, 2007)

At the elementary level, BPYS was found to lead to increased recognition by students that bullying was discouraged, reductions in bullying and related behaviors, and favorable impact on student attitudes toward physical and relational aggression. At the middle school level, students were also more likely to recognize that bullying was discouraged and BPYS was said to

have a favorable impact on attitudes toward physical and relational aggression. Though

reductions in bullying behaviors were found, due to methodological considerations (the

intervention schools reported lower levels of bullying than the comparison schools prior to

intervention and a treatment and comparison middle school dropped out of the study), the

authors describe the results at the middle school level as 'inconclusive'.

Thus, research on the impact of Bully-Proofing Your School has generally shown that

BPYS has a positive impact on student attitudes toward bullying as well as reductions in bullying

behavior, in particular at the elementary level. Rigorous evaluation of BPYS at the middle

school level failed to yield conclusive results (Menard et al., 2007). The authors of this study

point out that this was due to technical problems not related to BPYS and that the findings,

though not definitive, were favorable toward Bully-Proofing Your School. More research will

be needed to determine whether these promising initial results are, in fact, repeatable at the

elementary level and attributable to BPYS at the middle school level.

References

Beran, T.N, & Tutty, L. (2002). *An Evaluation of the Dare to Care Bully-Proofing Your School*

Program. Unpublished, Calgary, Alberta. RESOLVE Alberta.

Berkey, L.G., Keyes, B.J., & Longhurst, I.E. (2001). Bully-Proofing: What one district learned

about improving school climate. *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 9(4), 224-228.

Cowie, H. (2000). Bystanding or standing by: Gender issues in coping with bullying in English

schools. Aggressive Behavior, 26, 85-97.

Elliott, D. S. (2006, March). Improving the effectiveness of delinquency, drug and violence

prevention efforts: Promise and practice. Presentation at the Blueprints Conference, Denver, Colorado.

Epstein, L., Plog, A.E., & Porter, W. (2002). "Bully-Proofing Your School: Results of a Four-Year Intervention," *The Report on Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Youth*. 2(3), pp. 55-56, 73-77.

Eslea, M. & Smith, P. K. (1998). The long-term effectiveness of anti-bullying work in primary schools. Education Research, 40 (2), 203-218.

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? *School Psychology Review, 23,* 365-383.

Menard, S., Grotpeter, J., Gianola, D., & O'Neal, M. (2007). *Evaluation of Bullyproofing Your School: Final Report*. Retrieved June, 2008 from http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=242926.

Nation, M., Crusto, C., Wandersman, A., Kumpfer, K. L., Seybolt, Morrisey-Kane, E., & Davino, K. (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of effective programs. *American Psychologist*, 58, 449-456.

Olweus, D. (1997). Bully/victim problems in school: Facts and intervention. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 12,* 495-110.

Orpinas, P., Horne, A. M., & Staniszewski, D. (2003). School bullying: Changing the problem by changing the school. *School Psychology Review, 23,* 431-444.

Pepler, D. J., Craig, W. M., Ziegler, S., & Charach, A. (1994). An evaluation of an anti-bullying intervention in Toronto schools. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 13(2),* 95-110.

Peterson, L., & Rigby, K. (1999). Countering bullying at an Australian secondary school with

students as helpers. *Journal of Adolescence, 22,* 481-92.

Salmivalli, C. (1999). Participant role approach to school bullying: Implications for

interventions. *Journal of Adolescence, 22,* 453-459.

Stevens, V., Van Oost, P., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2000). The effects of an anti-bullying

intervention programme on peers' attitudes and behaviour. *Journal of Adolescence, 23,*

21-34.