


2018

Administrator and Staff Perceptions of a Secondary School Antibullying Program

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Susan Michele Kazmierczak

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2018

Abstract

Administrator and Staff Perceptions of a Secondary School Antibullying Program

by

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MS, Duquesne University, 2005

MS, Duquesne University, 1996

BA, University of Pittsburgh, 1994

Research Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2018

Abstract

Despite the increase in bullying behavior that has occurred among high school students, there is a lack of age appropriate intervention programs available to assist secondary administrators and staff with this problem. The purpose of this case study in 1 high school in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city in the United States was to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an adapted antibullying program, originally created for use in elementary schools, in reducing the incidences of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. This study was also designed to explore how administrators and staff perceived if the bullying prevention program fostered prosocial behavior, and the extent to which the program reduced peer aggression, peer harassment, and strain. The conceptual framework was general strain theory described by Durkheim and Merton. The design for this case study included interviews with 5 teachers and 3 administrators who had been involved in implementation of the antibullying program. Open coding was used to organize and analyze the data for the emergence of significant concepts and patterns. Codes were formulated into four associated meanings or themes; relationships, student responsibility, positive culture, and trusting and supportive environment. The results indicated that school personnel were able to modify an existing bullying prevention program that has changed the culture of the school and the mindset of its student body while helping the students to alleviate strain and issues of aggression and harassment. The current research may affect social change by encouraging other secondary schools to assess their bullying prevention programs to determine if the material being used is age appropriate for secondary students and if the programs are indeed alleviating bullying behavior and strain in their students.

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Dedication

This doctoral research study is dedicated to my father and my mother, without whose support I would not have been able to fulfill this dream. They have sacrificed so much all their lives for their family, and without them, I would not be where I am today. They taught me the meaning of hard work and dedication, and to never give up on hopes and aspirations. Although my dad passed away a few short months ago and is not here to see me fulfill my research, I know that he is looking down upon me and proud of what I have accomplished.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and the determination that I needed to complete my doctoral study. At times it was a long, challenging journey, but he gave me the courage and the motivation needed to complete my study.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Patricia Anderson for her guidance as my committee chair. She has been kind, patient, and most of all encouraging towards me through this entire process. I have learned so much from her, and the knowledge that she imparted will never be forgotten. She has truly been an inspiration. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Wattam, my second committee member, for his wisdom and expertise throughout my journey. These two individuals will never be forgotten, and I will always be grateful to them for making this experience so special.

I would also like to thank my entire family for listening to the endless stories about my dissertation and all the love and support that they have given me

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

A verbal insult, an intentional physical attack, a demeaning text message, or blog on a social networking site in cyberspace; these are just some of the encounters that many school children experience as victims of bullying behavior. According to Hong (2009), bullying is not a normal part of growing up but rather a major problem affecting the well-being and social functioning of children and adolescents in schools. According to Geoffroy et al. (2015), 50% of children have been the victims of a bully. In this study, I determined the perceptions of administrators and staff at a single high school located in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States regarding an antibullying program, originally created for use in elementary schools but applied in a secondary school setting, in reducing bullying behavior in a secondary school

Problem Statement

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), 22% of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school during the school year; this was a lower percentage than the percentage reported in every prior survey year since 2005, when the incidence of bullying ranged from 28% to 32%. Although the reports of bullying among adolescents appear to be in decline, research has confirmed that many children who are bullied develop suicidal ideation, feelings of anxiety, decreased academic achievement and attendance as well as depression (Geoffroy et al., 2015; Sibold, Edwards, Close, & Hudziak, 2015).

Because the consequences for victims of bullying at the secondary level can be severe and due to the violence and feelings of strain associated with bullying, the need for effective programming at the secondary level is even more compelling (Geoffroy et al., 2015). Victims of bullying need interventions that help them develop more positive self-views and that teach them not to blame themselves for the harassment (Espelage & Srabstein, 2016; Sibold et al., 2015). An effective antibullying program fosters prosocial behavior and reduces aggression and peer harassment by changing disrespectful attitudes and replacing them with positive and caring relationship-focused behaviors (Soujourner & Hyatt, 2014).

Despite the bullying and cyberbullying that occur at the secondary level, there is a lack of age-appropriate intervention programs available to assist secondary administrators and staff with the problem (citation). Most high schools do prohibit bullying; however, enforcing the policy is often challenging at the secondary level due to the lack of intervention methods and resources that are available (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010). There are numerous bullying intervention programs for elementary-aged students, but few intervention programs exist intended specifically for secondary settings. Maunder and Tattersall (2010) suggested that the lack of intervention programs can be attributed to the fact that secondary schools are larger and more complex than their elementary counterparts and that resistance to change at the secondary level is greater than at the elementary level (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010). While several studies exist that document the success of elementary school bullying prevention programs, a gap in knowledge can

clearly be found with respect to determining the experiences of teachers and administrators participating in an elementary-level bullying prevention program that has been applied to a secondary school setting.

According to the principal at the school that is the focus of this study, several possible items have contributed to the lack of bullying intervention problems at the target high school (personal communication, December 2013). Although rules regarding the harassment of students existed in the past, the district had never implemented an intervention or prevention plan for bullying. In addition, administrators at the school of focus asserted that even though the students had been apprised of bullying prohibitions via the student handbook, the students did not have a clear understanding of exactly what constituted bullying or what the consequences were for violating the rule because a policy was never reviewed with the students by teachers or administrators via class meetings or assemblies, nor was a policy adopted by the school board of the district (personal communication, December 2013). Because of this, the district adopted the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program as a district-wide mandate in 2011 to be incorporated at all buildings throughout the district. While the Olweus program has a curriculum and handbook to follow for the elementary level, a curriculum had not been developed for the secondary level, thus placing this responsibility in the hands of the secondary administrators.

The high school administrators had the task of creating a bullying prevention program based upon the Olweus model, which was age appropriate for secondary

administrators. The administrators reviewed the elementary antibullying curriculum to create a program that would be appropriate for students ranging from 14 to 19 years of age (personal communication, December 2013). The newly created high school bullying intervention model was implemented at the school which is the focus of the study during the 2012-2013 school year. At the time of this study the school was entering its fifth year of integrating the program.

School districts are required to implement policies under the antibullying legislation that focus on emphasizing the importance of changing school culture and climate, developing a school-wide approach, and being proactive in combating bullying (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). School personnel, particularly but not exclusively at the secondary level, need to be legally literate about the particular provision in their state laws (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012), despite the lack of resources for intervention that are currently available. On April 21, 2015, Governor Bullock, of the state of Montana, signed his state's antibullying policy in effect, making it official that all 50 states have now a law or policy regarding bullying (Ansary, Elias, Greene, & Green, 2015). Montana is the only state that passed a statewide policy discussing bullying without having enacted a statute specifically prohibiting it, unlike the other 49 states that passed laws defining bullying and authorizing school officials or authorities to take appropriate action to stop it (Ansary et al., 2015).

Since the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, over 73% of secondary schools in the United States have implemented bullying prevention programs to address the

problem of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). While numerous programs regarding bullying prevention exist for elementary and middle-grade students, antibullying curriculum at the secondary level is lacking. These administrators ponder how to address the bullying issue without a tool designed specifically for their students. According to the principal of the target school, administrators at the secondary level have become frustrated with the lack of resources available to assist with the implementation of programs that are now required by legislation. My research will incorporate older research due to the lack of current studies that exist regarding secondary bullying intervention programs. The older research has been included to provide needed context for the study.

The administrators at the school that is the focus of this study have met with school administrators from other suburban high schools in their area to discuss the lack of secondary bullying intervention programs and to compare the strategies that those schools use. The administrators at the target school have also attended several national conferences during the past 3 years at a large university in the Mid-Atlantic region to meet and discuss with school administrators from other parts of the country issues of bullying in schools. According to the principal of the target school, there has been a consensus among the school administrators from across the country who attended these conferences that antibullying programs are lacking age appropriate content for secondary students (personal communication, December 2013). According to this source, many of the administrators attempted to create their own programs. The efficacy of these newly

created programs in reducing peer-to-peer aggression has yet to be determined by the administrators of the schools. The lack of secondary bullying intervention programs is a problem for high school administrators across the country and forms the focus of this study.

Nature of the Study

The research conducted in my study was qualitative in nature. Through my study, I identified themes that emerged from the perceptions of the administrators and staff regarding the bullying prevention program that was currently in place at the target school. Data included how the administrators and staff perceived the bullying prevention program fosters prosocial behavior, reduces aggression and peer harassment, and diminishes feelings of strain. The data were generated through a series of personal interviews with a purposeful sampling of staff members at the target school.

The guiding questions for the study were

1. How do administrators and staff perceive the bullying prevention program at the target school with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain?
2. How does the bullying prevention program at the target school foster prosocial behavior and diminish feelings of strain according to the perceptions of the administrators and staff?
3. Has the bullying prevention program adapted from the elementary level reduced incidences of aggression and peer harassment at the target school?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in elementary schools in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. The target school is located in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States. An analysis of administrator and staff perceptions is important because, according to Hong (2009), effective intervention programs foster prosocial behavior and reduce aggression and peer harassment. The perceptions of the administrators and staff identified aspects of the program in this study that were functioning well and those aspects that were not functioning well. As a result, enhancements can be made to the prevention program in order to improve its success. The results of this research can assist with guiding future research that targets specific areas of concern and strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of my study is the general strain theory begun by Durkheim (1951) and Merton (1938). According to general strain theory, individuals experience strain and, because of that strain, feel angry or frustrated (Agnew, 2000). Hiduja and Patchin (2011) speculated that individuals under strain are more at risk to engage in deviant behavior such as traditional and nontraditional forms of bullying. The general strain theory was chosen for my conceptual framework because strain creates feelings of anger and frustration in individuals, and one such outlet for those individuals is to use negative actions to alleviate strain. Bullies also use negative actions such as

harassment and physical aggression as ways to cope with the feelings of frustration or strain that they are experiencing (Broidy & Agnew, 1997).

The antibullying program that is the focus of the study was developed for elementary grade students. The high school administration and staff, in adopting this program in the absence of available age-appropriate curriculum, hoped that the activities and interactions that comprise the program might help to alleviate peer aggression and peer harassment in the target school. In this study, I examined the perceptions of the administrators and staff regarding whether or not the bullying prevention program implemented at the target school helped to alleviate peer aggression, peer harassment, and strain. A fuller description of general strain theory will be presented in the literature review.

Definitions

Throughout this study, several key terms will continue to appear and so should be defined.

Peer Victimization: Physical, verbal, or psychological abuse that occurs in and around school, especially where adult supervision is minimal (Graham, 2010).

Targeted Programs: Programs that are designed for a subgroup of individuals at risk of bullying or for those who have committed a violent act. (Richards, 2012).

Victim: A victim is often a person who suffers from destructive acts, either emotionally or physically (Williams, 2010). Many believe that victims are mostly

random, undeserving people that were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time (Williams, 2010).

Whole School Approach: An approach that is predicated on the assumption that bullying is a systemic problem and, by implication, that intervention must be directed at the entire school context rather than just at individual bullies and victims (Richards, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, Delimitations

One assumption regarding my research study is that the perceptions of the administrators and staff were truthful and accurate. Another assumption I made is that information provided by the administrators and staff did not exclude key facts. I assumed that administrators and staff were unbiased regarding their descriptions of the program and the school.

A possible limitation of the research is its reliance on interviews of a subset of the school community. Additional means exist to evaluate the bullying prevention program at the target high school, but they were not used for this study. For example, a survey could have been administered to the administrators and staff, or students and parents could have been interviewed with respect to their perceptions of the program. A qualitative design was chosen to elicit perceptions of those most responsible for the implementation of the antibullying program, and this design incurred inherent limitations.

Another limitation could be the transferability to other schools in the geographic area as well as other schools in the district such as the middle school and elementary

schools. My study focused on a single high school in a single suburb in a single region of the United States. This limitation derives from the choice of problem and research design and affects the generalizability of the results.

Significance of the Study

The data received during my study demonstrate what aspects of the newly implemented bullying prevention program are functioning well and those aspects that are not functioning well. My findings indicated the program that was currently in place at the target school revolves around four main themes: relationships, student responsibility, positive culture, and trusting and supportive environment.

The importance of bullying prevention programs can be seen through the power expressed by the four themes above as well as through the mentoring component of the program. The mentoring component of the bullying prevention program allows students to have a venue for open discussions concerning how to treat people with respect and dignity. It also teaches students to focus on the positive instead of the negative as well as teaching the students how to behave appropriately. The program uses open discussions about making good decisions, which allows the teachers to encourage positive behavior. Through the mentoring program, teachers provide positive reinforcement to students by serving as role models, which increases prosocial behavior and reduces feelings of strain with the students. A curriculum that incorporates such activities as group discussions and guest speakers and lessons such as the ones used in the target school help to foster respect and tolerance with respect to cultural differences.

My study has potential to positively affect social change through the teaching of positive behaviors such as accountability and responsibility. As educators continue their journey through the 21st century, the goal of administrators and teachers should be to create a learning where the environment is one where safety prevails, students develop positive social skills, and students learn how to solve conflicts peacefully.

Summary

In this study, I analyzed the perceptions of administrators and staff regarding an antibullying program that was adapted from an elementary school curriculum and applied in a secondary setting, specifically a high school in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States. My study addressed whether the prevention program has fostered prosocial behavior and reduced aggression, peer harassment, and feelings of strain. The research conducted in my study was based upon the perceptions of administrators and staff regarding the antibullying program implemented at the high school in the study. The goal of the study included how the administrators and staff perceived the bullying prevention program with respect to ways the program fostered prosocial behavior and diminished feelings of strain, and reduced aggression and peer harassment among students, were generated through a series of personal interviews. In upcoming sections of my research study, I will address current literature pertaining to qualitative studies that have been conducted on topics related to bullying and bullying prevention programs (Section 2). I will discuss the research design and approach of my study as well data

analysis procedures and validation procedures that I used to examine my research findings in Section 3.

Section 2: Literature Review

In this study I examined the perceptions of administrators and staff regarding an antibullying program adapted from an elementary school curriculum and applied in a secondary setting in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States. In my study, I determined the extent to which the prevention program was perceived to have fostered prosocial behavior and reduced student aggression, peer harassment, and feelings of strain. In this section, I will present a critical review studies conducted on bullying. This review includes a description of the study's conceptual framework of general strain theory, research on the extent and effects of bullying among secondary students, and legal and curricular efforts to reduce bullying in educational settings. This section will conclude by suggesting this study's contributions for positive social change.

Search of the Literature

The research that I have obtained is from peer-reviewed sources such as journals and books found in educational databases that include ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education from SAGE. Search terms that were used in my research include: *bullying; bullying in schools; bullying and adolescent; strain theory; peer harassment; cyberbullying; peer aggression; bullying prevention programs; Olweus bullying prevention program; secondary school bullying prevention programs; elementary bullying prevention programs; and bullying and mental health*. The studies are a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research. There appears to be a lack of research pertaining to the experiences of teachers and administrators participating in an

elementary-level bullying prevention program that has been applied to a secondary school setting.

Conceptual Framework

General strain theory forms the conceptual framework for this study. This theory resulted from the work of Durkheim (1951) and Merton (1938) and the theory of anomie. Durkheim focused on the decrease of societal restraint and the strain that resulted at the individual level, and Merton studied the cultural imbalance that exists between the goals and the norms of the individuals of society.

Durkheim (1951) developed his theory of anomie, which proposed that people are basically good but will turn to crime when they feel as if they have no alternatives. Durkheim's research indicates that crime and deviance are intricately interwoven with the degree of belongingness the individual has to one as cited in Franzese (2009). According to Durkheim (1951), normlessness occurs when society loses the ability to control the behavior of its members. Anomie can be broken down into two levels: the macroside, which is manifest in society's inability to set limits on goals and regulate individual conduct, and the microside, which is also known as the strain theory, and focuses on poor academic performance and social isolation because of viewing the environment as hazardous (Agnew, 1997).

Merton (1938) supported the ideas of Durkheim with respect to the impact of normlessness of society. Merton's (1957) ideas centered around the notion that monetary gain is a source of strain for individuals, and a discrepancy exists between the

relationship of valued goals and the process whereby one would achieve those goals. Merton (1938) believed that society holds the same expectations for all members but does not provide an equal opportunity for all members to achieve goals. According to Merton (1957), there are five adaptive styles to anomie: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Merton theorized that people adapt in a variety of ways to achieve desired goals by circumventing legitimate ways to achieve them (Akins, Smith, & Mosher, 2010). The popularity of the theory of anomie declined during the 1960's due to several factors including the evidence found by the researchers, the political climate of the decade, and the lack of supporting data (Agnew & Passas, 1997).

Because of the lack of data, Agnew (1997) conducted scholarly and empirical research on the original general theory during the past two decades, and revisions were made to the theory. The research that was conducted refocused the sources of strain, based upon the individual and various forms of strain instead of just monetary strain. According to Agnew, "strain involves relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated" (Agnew, 1992, p. 48). Agnew (1992) considered alternative sources of strain such as the failure to achieve positively valued goals and the confrontation of negative stimuli (e.g. repeated academic failure or the onset of emotional problems). According to the theory, negative emotions arise and become a source of strain between people (Agnew, 1992). As a result, strain can manifest itself in relationships through emotional and physical responses.

Agnew (2000) also contended that strain makes people feel angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, and essentially creates pressure for corrective action as a means to alleviate the bad feelings, the same feelings that victims of bullying often express. Coping mechanisms and the effectiveness of an individual to use them play an important role in how individuals take corrective action towards strain that they experience (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Factors such as coping resources, coping skills, social support, constraints to delinquent coping, and one's disposition toward delinquency have been argued to potentially help redirect one's negative emotions away from deviant behaviors (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). According to Broidy and Agnew (1997), those individuals with a large support network including family and friends are less likely to move towards delinquent behavior when managing strain. Those who do not have a large support network navigate towards negative means to correct the bad feelings.

One such way that individuals eradicate the bad feelings is through bullying others. Because of the increased potential of teens to commit bullying actions, high schools have attempted to take proactive measures in the form of bullying prevention programs, counseling, and prosocial outlets (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The antibullying program that is the focus of the study contends that the activities and interactions that comprise the program will help to alleviate peer aggression and peer harassment in the target school (Olweus, 1991). In this study I addressed how secondary administrators and staff perceive the effectiveness of the antibullying program in reducing in the incidence of bullying behavior at the target school, how well the bullying prevention program has

fostered prosocial behavior, and the extent to which the program at this school has reduced peer aggression, peer harassment, and strain. The following review of literature presents research that connects general strain theory and secondary school life to the problem of reducing bullying behavior. As indicated previously, this review draws on the most recent research, even though many studies were published over 5 years ago. The problem of bullying continues, even though scholarly interest appears to have moved on.

How Bullying Affects Secondary Students

There are no simple explanations for bullying; rather, it is a complex phenomenon with many causal factors and consequences (Bhukhanwala, 2014). Researchers have found that incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying have a negative effect on both student achievement and student attendance (Bryn, 2011). These incidents are defined by unwanted, aggressive behaviors that include a real or perceived imbalance of power and are repeated over time (Neiman, Robers, & Robers, 2012). About 30% of middle and high school students throughout the United States report that they are involved in some type of bullying behavior (either as bully, victim, or bystander) on a daily basis (Lund, Blake, Ewing, & Banks, 2012). Students who are regularly involved in bullying incidents are more likely to experience poor self-esteem, depression, anxiety about going to school, and even suicidal thoughts (Gourneau, 2012). As a result, there has been increased pressure for secondary schools to implement bullying prevention programs to curtail bullying and negative behavior.

Bullying falls into four general categories: direct physical (assaults, thefts), direct verbal (threats, insults), indirect relational (social exclusion, spreading nasty rumors), and cyber or electronic (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Traditional bullying via name calling, verbal insults, and physical aggression are some of the most prevalent forms of bullying that exist (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). In the educational arena of secondary schools; however, students are technologically savvy, and incidents of bullying through electronic media continue to surge due to the anonymity of actions by the aggressors. Electronic bullying may occur through social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and Ask.fm, which allows anonymous postings and has been linked to numerous suicides throughout the world (Younger, 2013). The electronic nature of cyber bullying allows it to occur under the radar without drawing attention of teachers, parents, or other authoritative figures (Hay & Meldrum, 2010). Some secondary schools have begun to offer training for parents and staff to recognize the cyber bullying that occurs through popular forums.

Bullying messages that are transmitted through forums such as Facebook or Twitter (cyber bullying) also have the advantage of not being seen by those in authority since the messages may be privately exchanged (Hay & Meldrum, 2010). Students conceal their true identities by creating aliases or false names in an attempt to bully their victims without being caught by the victims, authorities, and parents or guardians (Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010). By concealing their identities through socially-shared online forums, aggressors believe that they can inflict more harm upon their

victims and inflict it 24 hours a day (Klomek et al., 2010). According to several authors, cyberbullied students experience negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance, similar to those experienced by others bullied by more conventional means (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Wade & Beran, 2011). As technology continues to change and new social platforms become established, it will be crucial for secondary schools to create an awareness for parents and staff regarding these new outlets.

Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization

Peer aggression and peer victimization are two components of present-day bullying behavior. Akgun and Araz (2014) contended that peer victimization is a common and urgent problem in schools. Relational or peer aggression is part of bullying phenomena. It seeks to damage peer relationships through rejection, isolation, and character assassination through covert and often unnoticed means (Gomes, 2011). Examples of relational aggression include rumor spreading and backstabbing and may be experienced by both boys and girls (Gomes, 2011). Faris and Felmlee (2014) found that school-based victimization develops from group processes such as status conflict and norm enforcement; in other words, aggression is instrumental for social climbing for those trying to make an impression or trying to fit in with a peer group that is high on the social hierarchy pyramid. According to Borch, Hyde, and Cillissen (2011), there is a connection between aggression and popularity and physical attractiveness and popularity. Attractive students are seen as more physically and relationally aggressive than those

who are less attractive, and those who are both physically attractive and aggressive are perceived to be more popular than those without such characteristics. Saino, Veenstra, Huitsing, and Salmivalli (2012) found that peer victimizers select as their victims those who already feel rejected and who lack self-esteem. These aggressors intentionally create and enforce standards or norms of what they believe is acceptable or not (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). The norms may govern physical appearance or even sexuality and gender. According to Van Der Valk (2013), “It is during these times of social uncertainty where some kids resort to primitive means to establish social hierarchy” (p. 40). Failure to adhere to the norms leads to peer victimization and internal and external conflicts for the victims. The symbiotic relationship between victims and victimizers suggests that both parties in a bullying episode need guidance to resolve their conflict.

Conflict Resolution Training

Because of victimization, conflicts will likely arise. Conflict may be addressed through either constructive or destructive means, depending on the individuals involved. Unfortunately, children tend to resolve their conflicts by fighting or withdrawing because they are not taught constructive conflict resolution strategies (Akgun & Araz, 2014).

According to Akgun and Araz (2014), schools that provide conflict resolution training to their students increased constructive conflict resolution skills and social competency of their students while decreasing reactive and proactive aggression levels. Conflict resolution is an important component of bullying prevention programs (Akgun & Araz, 2014). Programs that incorporate conflict resolution play a part in reducing

aggression and violence. Instead of immediately resulting to violence, students trained in conflict resolution demonstrate negotiation skills as well as relying on the assistance of adults in the school such as teachers or the principal (Lester et al, 2015). Akgun and Araz, stated that the two main purposes of a successful conflict resolution program are to make the schools safe by creating a caring environment where all students have the opportunity to learn without threat while maximizing their potential, and to socialize students so that they may have the necessary skills to resolve conflicts without aggression or violence.

Developmental Needs of Elementary versus Secondary Students

According to Lester, Mander, and Cross (2015), researchers have begun to study what happens to students developmentally from the time they begin elementary school through the time they enter middle and high school. During the elementary school years, typically kindergarten through fourth grade, elementary-aged students begin to develop feelings of confidence with respect to their learning skills as well as feelings of competence (Lester et al, 2015). It is at this time that they learn to develop fundamental decision-making skills, communication and life skills, and shape their character values (Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2009). In addition, students' attitudes towards school peers, as well as their own self-image, begin to form. It is crucial at this time to identify academic and personal or social needs of students in order to provide support and interventions that may be needed to remove barriers that could impede academic achievement (Lester et al, 2015).

In an elementary school, the student is often part of a self-contained classroom where the primary contact is with one or two teachers (Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2009), whereas in a secondary school, a student moves from class to class with different teachers according to their assigned schedule. As elementary students transition to secondary school, they are faced with such issues as exposure to unfamiliar peers, increases in teacher control, stricter discipline policies, and decreased teacher-student personalization (Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2009). Students are taught to become more independent in secondary school, and they experience physical growth changes that affect their cognitive ability and emotional capabilities. According to Cullen and Robles-Pina (2009), the three primary effects on students as they transition from elementary to secondary school are friendship quality, student social concerns, and academic performance. As a result of this, school districts have begun to implement transition programs that assist students in becoming acclimated to their new surroundings.

Adolescence is a developmental stage in life that is associated with major cognitive, emotional, physiological, and social needs (Lester et al., 2015). The high school years are a time when students begin the transition into adulthood and search for their identities, strengths, and skills (Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2009). Increased academic pressures as well as pressures from families and friends can be challenging and daunting. According to Lester et al. (2015), it is a period of self-realization when students seek to explore their independence and to separate themselves from their parents. It is also a time for students to make decisions regarding future education and potential career paths as

they prepare to enter adult life. Students typically look to their peers for acceptance and a place to belong during their teen years (Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2009). Adolescence coincides with the onset of puberty and is typically described by parents as a period in which they attune to their child's growing need for autonomy and greater desire to source social support from same aged peers (Lester et al., 2015). The need for social acceptance and independence can create an added pressure for adolescents who are trying to make the transition into their teen years.

The Scope of Bullying in Secondary Schools

As students enter middle and high school, they may experience various types of bullying. Bullying creates anxiety within the school climate and can affect a student's social and interpersonal development (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012). Researchers have found that bullying increases during the later stages of elementary then peaks after school transitions from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school (Von Marees & Peterman, 2010; Ryoo, Wang, & Swearer, 2015; Lester et al., 2015). About 30% of middle and high school students throughout the United States reported that they are involved in some type of bullying behavior (either as a bully, victim, or bystander) on a daily basis (Lund et al., 2012). Bullying among teenagers has been associated with other forms of antisocial behavior such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, dropping out of school, fighting, and drug use (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). Secondary students who avoid school due to safety concerns miss learning opportunities; avoiding school may lead to issues of truancy. The consequences for victims of bullying

at the secondary level can be severe, including depression, suicide, and low self-esteem, and as the levels of aggression and violence associated with bullying rise, need for effective programming at the secondary level is even more compelling (Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter, 2005; Geoffroy et al., 2015). Without an effective intervention program, high schools face the possibility of allowing the problem of bullying to escalate further and possibly lead to issues with school crime and psychological distress for their students, teachers, and administrators (Allen, 2010).

Victims of bullying need interventions that help them develop more positive self-views and that teach them not to blame themselves for the harassment (Graham, 2010). Fais and Felmlee (2014) indicated that creating and maintaining a positive, trusting school climate can function as a form of bullying prevention (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Positive change can occur when strategies develop that facilitate school stakeholders working together by initiating building-level change that results in an improved school climate and allows administrators to deal with anger and aggression as well as with interpersonal problems through alternative channels (Terry, 2010). State legislatures have begun to address the problem of bullying and harassment by enacting laws requiring secondary schools to implement bullying prevention problems.

Recognizing and Removing the Risks of Bullying

In January 2011, the state of New Jersey implemented an Antibullying Bill of Rights, believed to be one of the toughest state laws intended to regulate harassment, intimidation, and bullying (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). By the beginning of 2012, 48 of the

50 states in the United States had adopted legislation that required school districts to implement policies regarding bullying (Neiman et al, 2012). As of March 2015, Montana was the last state to have adopted bullying policies for public school districts (Ansary et al., 2015). It was the hope of legislators that schools would implement the policies and provide training to school employees in order to alleviate and prevent further bullying behaviors. The policies focused on the importance of changing school culture and climate, developing a school-wide approach, and being proactive in combating bullying (Kennedy et al., 2012). However, at the secondary level, the schools have lacked the tools and resources needed to implement the policies due to a lack of age-appropriate content. For instance, the four steps needed to be applied in recognizing and removing bullying in school include identifying the peril, assessing the hazard, controlling the risk, and evaluating and reviewing the process (Allen, 2010). To do this, administrators need guidance that is appropriate to the age of their students and the organization of the school community. As I noted previously, there are differences in the psychological and social needs of elementary and secondary students and differences in the organization of elementary and secondary schools. Yet antibullying curricula predominately if not exclusively have been intended for use in elementary school settings only. In addition, administrators need to understand that ignoring bullying behavior will only perpetuate the problem (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013). The lack of age-appropriate antibullying curricula has contributed to the secondary school bullying problem.

State Antibullying Legislation

Due to increased incidence of bullying behavior among the country's youth, both local and state lawmakers in the United States have taken a number of legislative actions to minimize instances of bullying in schools and to protect children (Ansary et al., 2015). However, each state addressed bullying differently through laws and model policies (Ansary et al., 2015). In general, cyberbullying, bullying, and related behaviors may be addressed in a single law or in multiple laws or may appear in the criminal code of states.

The vision behind these laws was to create programs that encourage antibullying strategies and interventions that can be used in the classroom (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, & Ferrin, 2012; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). In December 2010, the United States Department of Education comprehensively reviewed state laws and outlined 11 key components of state antibullying legislations (Bryn, 2011). The first component stipulates that the state legislations must consist of a purpose statement, which outlines the range of harmful effects of bullying in administrators. The purpose statement should contain a declaration indicating that any type, form, or level of bullying is unacceptable (Bryn, 2011). The second component, or statement of scope, covers all forms of conduct that may create substantial disruptions to school environment (Bryn, 2011). In its third component, the state legislations must specify what constitutes prohibited conduct by providing a specific definition of bullying. Included in the fourth component is an enumeration of specific characteristics of bullying (Bryn, 2011). The fifth component provides guidelines regarding the development and implementation of

policies that prohibit bullying by state and local educational agencies (LEAs). The components of LEA policies, as outlined in the sixth component, should include definitions, procedures on how to report bullying, procedures on how to investigate and respond to bullying, written records, sanctions, and referrals. The seventh component presents guidelines regarding the review of local policies on bullying. Provided in the eighth component are the communication plans for informing administrators, staff and parents of policies connected to bullying (including its consequences). The ninth component provides a provision for training and preventive education on bullying behaviors in schools followed by the tenth component, transparency and monitoring, which obligates LEAs to report to the state on all matters relating to bullying, and to make the data available to the public. The purpose of the antibullying laws is to foster school communities that are safe and conducive to student learning (Weaver, Brown, Weddle, & Aisma, 2013). Local education agencies need to continue to work with the members of their educational communities to develop policies and programs that may foster change with respect to bullying in schools and help to curtail the problem.

Bullying Prevention Curriculum

As bullying, victimization, and relational aggression continue to affect children, one way to educate administrators, parents, teachers, and administrators about the phenomena of these topics is through a bullying prevention curriculum (Smith, 2011). According to Smith (2011), administrators must understand that ignoring bullying behavior only perpetuates the problem and does not bring about any change. The teaching

of antibullying behaviors may also foster such positive behaviors as accountability and responsibility (Vivolo, Holt, & Massetti, 2011). According to Marsh et al. (2014), a positive school climate promotes higher student engagement in school and consequently less aggression. School administrators must work to create curricula that will help to foster positive change in their schools.

Wong and Wong (2009) believed that the curriculum should be a document created by a committee consisting of teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists. According to Kim (2011), “teachers are the conduit between the curriculum and the administrators” (p. 54). The curriculum should also identify content, suggest key instructional methods to be used in the classroom, and recommend activities to deliver the curriculum effectively (Wong & Wong, 2009). In the high school setting, bullying prevention curricula can involve various strategies and activities (Rigby & Smith, 2011; Villancourt et al., 2010). Antibullying curricula may incorporate such activities as group discussions, role playing, short films, and guest speakers (Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012). This type of curriculum will help to foster respect and tolerance with respect to cultural differences.

The goal of administrators and teachers should be to create a learning environment in which students develop positive social skills and learn how to solve conflicts peacefully. Vanderline and van Braak’s (2011) study suggested that leadership beliefs and attitudes influence teacher ability to successfully use the curriculum. When there is “buy-in” of the curriculum from the teaching staff, the likelihood of success for

the curriculum increases; thus, administrators must work to ensure that curriculum is accepted and supported by the staff to ensure optimal results.

Teachers' Perceptions Concerning Curriculum

Teachers perceive curriculum as a theoretical text, political text, scope (content), or as guide books prepared by publishers, and that the curriculum is shaped in practice (Yurdakul, 2015). There are two approaches with respect to curriculum implementation: adoption and adaptation. Adoption tests whether the curriculum is implemented as it is designed or not and focuses on finding the points of failure (Yurdakul, 2015). Adoption usually occurs when the design is done by specialists rather than by teachers. Adaptation refers to the fact that curricular arrangements could be made by curriculum specialists and real implementers at the class level (Yurdakul, 2015). Due to the lack of bullying prevention programs at the secondary level, high school administrators and teachers have predominately done some form of curriculum adaptation in order to create a program that is applicable within their schools (Yurdakul, 2015).

Teachers also perceive curriculum as being shaped under practice and created by situational factors such as instructional processes, student characteristics, teacher competencies, and infrastructure opportunities (Yurdakul, 2015). As a result of this, perceptions of the of the antibullying program at the high school in my research study may have been shaped under practice by the situational factors that participants experienced at the target school.

Challenges and Limitations of Implementing a Prevention Program

One of the first steps in establishing an effective antibullying program is to form a school safety team consisting of administrators, teachers, and students (Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012). Another important step in developing an effective antibullying program is to incorporate antibullying lessons and curriculum into the classroom environment (Goldweber, Wassdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). In order to fulfill these steps, the administration must support a provision of professional development for the staff to ensure that every teacher is devoted to doing his or her part with respect to delivering the anticipated programs in the school and creating consequences for unsuitable behavior. The professional development strategies might include guest speakers, videos, and literature depicting how to respond to bullying behavior, and group discussions between the administrators, teachers, and other professional staff (Appleyard & McLean, 2011; Kosciw, Gretyak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Professional development may also incorporate training from the school safety team.

A key limitation with implementation pertains to the degree of experience of educators in most schools. The implication is that some teachers may be working towards improving the safe climate while others may be ignoring the happenings in their classrooms and hallways (Goldweber et al., 2013). Because of this, students suffer from learning inappropriate behaviors. When only a portion of teachers are involved in mediation, character education, teacher advisory period, and conflict resolutions while other teachers are not, students receive conflicting information regarding these topics,

even if only implicitly. According to Goldweber et al. (2013), principals are key change-leaders in offering professional development regarding bullying and tolerance, and in closely monitor teacher implementation of an antibullying program and keeping teachers accountable for tackling unsuitable behavior. Principals also must be open to students who have something, either academic or social, say regarding the school or classroom (Goldweber et al., 2013). It is important to create an environment where a student feels free to talk to any teacher and get something helpful out of it (Olweus, 1991). The formation of relationships between students and the staff will help to foster an environment of trust and a level of comfort.

The second limitation includes giving sufficient time to implementing any new program into a school. The longer it takes for a program to become implemented, the longer it will take for positive changes to be seen among the staff (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009). Ongoing staff team-building is crucial during the program lifetime, otherwise the program could be seen as useless or a waste of time (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009). Program implementation entails time for data collection, data interpretation, staff training on the chosen program, and advertising the program along with its new policies and expectations to students and parents.

A new program is expected to take up to three or four years to successfully implement (Low, Van Ryzin, Brown, Smith, & Haggerty, 2013). Students in grades eleven and twelve may have the most difficult time complying with new policies because

since they have familiarized themselves with the old system. Student engagement in a new program is affected by factors at both the classroom and school level, as student engagement in prevention lessons is most strongly associated with student climate, e.g., trust among students, how students get along, and how much students are willing to help each other out (Low et al., 2013). During the implementation period, parents, staff, and administrators should complete annual assessments of the program in an effort to recognize what is not working well with the program and possible changes that will allow the program to run smoothly and efficiently. In this study, I was able to discover the perceptions of secondary school administrators and staff of the target school, with respect to how the bullying prevention program at their school fosters prosocial behavior and reduces aggression and peer harassment while diminishing feelings of strain.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the study may assist in developing strategies to decrease the number of incidents of bullying as well as issues of school crime and psychological distress that arise from bullying. It is my hope that my research has provided avenues for improvement to personnel at the target school with respect to enhancing interventions that promote positive self-image and respect while improving the climate of the school. The findings of my study may also inform others who seek to create an antibullying curriculum tailored to the needs of secondary schools in other locations.

Summary

Through this review of literature, I examined the scope of bullying and how it affects secondary students as well as the concepts of developmental needs of students, types of bullying curriculum, teacher perceptions of curriculum, and state legislation, in order to thoroughly assess the limitations and challenges of a bullying prevention program. The goal of my research study was to examine the perceptions of administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in elementary schools but applied in a secondary school setting in reducing bullying behavior in a secondary school setting. In section 3, I will discuss the research design and approach and data analysis and validation procedures that I used to conduct this study.

Section 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in elementary schools in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. Perceptions of the administrators and staff were used to identify aspects of the program that they believe are functioning well and those aspects that need improvement. The results from my study lead to recommendations to the study school regarding whether enhancements should be made to the prevention program that is in place. In this section I will describe the research design that was utilized for the study as well as the sample type and the qualitative research that were used for data collection.

Research Design and Approach

In this qualitative research design study, I conducted personal interviews with members of the school's administration and staff to gain their perceptions of the antibullying program, which was originally created for use in elementary schools but applied in their secondary school setting, with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain among their secondary school students. I used emergent themes as a mechanism by which to analyze administrator and staff perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the prevention program in fostering prosocial behavior and reducing aggression, peer harassment, and feelings of strain.

I selected the case study design as the data collection strategy because my goal was to examine the experiences of teachers and administrators with respect to the adapted

antibullying curriculum. Glesne (2011) defined a case study approach as a rigorous research study of a person, institution, or organization over a period of time. A case study research design was selected because, according to Yin (1981), “As a research strategy, the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 59). Yin (2003) contended that researchers generally use the case study design as a strategy to contribute to that which is already known. A case study design enabled me to examine the perceptions of administrators and staff regarding whether the bullying prevention program alleviated incidents of peer aggression, harassment, and feelings of strain.

The qualitative research presented in this study is summative in nature and based upon outcomes, specifically the perceptions of the administrators and staff regarding the antibullying program that was implemented at the high school in the study. Summative data are collected to describe particular outcomes and to determine how the outcomes relate to the overall judgment of the phenomenon under study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The goal of my research study was to review the administrators’ and staff’s perceptions of the antibullying program about fostering prosocial behavior and reducing aggression, peer harassment, and feelings of strain. The summative data include personal interviews with stakeholders, who were selected from the educators employed at the target school.

When deciding upon a research design for the study, there were several possibilities that I considered, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys. I chose the interview process as my research design because interviews are particularly useful when it comes to procuring the story behind a participant's experiences (Kvale, 1996). Since my research includes perceptions of the administrators and staff regarding the antibullying program at the target school, interviews allowed me to go in depth on a factual and meaning level with respect to my research topic and to relate to the participants on a more personal level (Kvale, 1996). As the interviewer, I had the opportunity to work directly with the participants. Focus groups would not be as efficient as interviews, especially if the participants were hesitant to express their thoughts or perceptions among other group members. In addition, as noted by Bryman (2001), if the researcher is the moderator for a focus group, the researcher may inadvertently project his or her own personal biases into the focus group discussion, something that could greatly affect the outcome of the research. Interviews also have the advantage over research surveys in that the researcher can elaborate on the interview questions or to ask follow-up questions to the participant if their answers are vague or unclear (Bryman, 2001). My research design incorporated the general interview guide approach to ensure that the same general areas of information will be collected from each participant in the study (Turner, 2010).

My research design incorporated the general interview guide approach to ensure that the same general areas of information will be collected from each participant in the

study (Turner, 2010). Using interviews as a research design allowed me to take advantage of social cues such as voice intonation, and body language that were noticeable during the interview. This is something that would not be noticeable through research surveys.

Research Questions

The guiding questions for the study were

1. How do administrators and staff perceive the bullying prevention program at the target school with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain?
2. How does the bullying prevention program at the target school foster prosocial behavior and diminish feelings of strain according to the perceptions of the administrators and staff?
3. Has the bullying prevention program adapted from the elementary level reduced incidences of aggression and peer harassment at the target school?

Context

The setting for the study was a high school located in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States. The target high school is composed of approximately 1,258 students in grades 9-12 and 94 teachers (personal communication, December 2013). The population from which the sample for the study was drawn included administrators in Grades 9 through 12 as well as teachers from the focus high school. According to the principal of the target the school, the bullying prevention program is part of the district's "Positive Support on Learning" initiative and curriculum (personal

communication, December 2013). When the bullying prevention program was established in 2011, a bullying prevention team was created to promote and implement the program. The team consisted of the building principal, two assistant principals, three counselors, five teachers, and one police officer. Due to an administrator and teachers moving to other buildings in the district or leaving the district altogether, some individuals of the original team have been replaced with new members. At the time I conducted my study, the new team comprised the building principal, two assistant principals, the student assistance director, one counselor, and four teachers. The team was and is responsible for coordinating the monthly, 30-minute activities in which all administrators participate as part of the prevention program. The team meets once a week to discuss the feedback from the monthly activities as well as to plan future monthly activities (personal communication, December 2013).

A purposeful sampling method was used to identify participants. This method allowed all members of the teaching staff an equal probability of being invited to participate in the research. An email was sent to the entire staff and those individuals who wanted to participate responded to the email. The first five people to respond to the email were chosen for the study. In addition to the five teachers, the school principal and two other school administrators who volunteered to participate completed the participant group of eight individuals.

Interviews were conducted with each participant and myself, at a time convenient to each participant. Interviews took place in a school conference room.

Role of the Researcher

My concern as the researcher in this process was to maintain an unbiased point of view. As a former assistant principal of the target high school, I needed to focus on the data presented to me and not what I may have previously learned from my affiliation with the target high school. It should be noted that I no longer have a vested interest in the prevention program nor do I have any authoritative power over the participants since moving to the elementary level prior to the start of this study. One benefit of having a previously established relationship with the participants is that the participants may have felt more comfortable during the interview process. I made an effort to account for my bias during the interview process by making sure that my body language and tone of voice did not influence the participants into giving answers that might have reflected my own prejudices or beliefs. Questions during the interview process included open-ended questions that allowed the participants to answer based upon their own personal experience. It was my aim to create a collegial, thoughtful atmosphere for these conversations, so participants could feel at ease and free to be frank in their opinions.

Data Collection

Questions asked during the interviews (Appendix A) were created for this study, based on the research questions and the conceptual framework of general strain theory. I intended the questions to help me examine the perceptions of the stakeholders and whether or not the prevention program fosters prosocial behavior and reduces aggression and peer harassment. Questions I asked during the interview process were open-ended to

allow the participants to answer based upon their own personal experience. Such questions are usually not difficult for participants to answer and help participants to feel comfortable while speaking with the researcher (Glesne, 2011). Interview questions included the following:

1. What are some of the components of the bullying prevention program you feel produce prosocial behavior and reduce feelings of strain in the students?
2. Have you noticed a difference with respect to the behavior of the students, and how they interact with one another since the inception of the anti-bullying program? If so, please provide examples.
3. Has the program led to a more prosocial school climate with respect to how students handle situations of peer harassment and aggression? Why or why not?
4. Has the program led to a more prosocial school climate with respect to how students handle feelings of strain? Why or why not?
5. What changes, if any, would you suggest to the program, and why would you make those changes to the antibullying program?

The interview process lasted approximately 30 minutes for each participant and took place in a conference room in the target school at mutually agreed upon dates and times. The interviews were recorded with a hand-held digital recording device, and I took notes during the interview process based upon the participants' responses. Each participant signed a consent form allowing me to record the contents of the personal interviews as part of the research process. After each interview, I verified the answers that were given

by each participant in order to clarify their responses and ensure the accuracy of my documentation. I checked my notes against the audiotapes of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded, then analyzed to determine themes that may have emerged during the sessions. The participants received a draft of the interview findings, which allowed them to review the draft for authenticity regarding the setting and accuracy of the data that they had supplied during the interview process.

The participants received a draft of the interview findings, which allowed them to review the draft for authenticity regarding the setting and accuracy of the data that they had supplied during the interview process. A qualified peer reviewer examined my data from the interviews to check for logical development of themes, conclusions, and recommendations. My peer reviewer was someone who possesses a doctorate degree, has published articles in the field of education, and has specialized knowledge with respect to the topic of my research. No interview participants made any corrections to their transcript and no changes were made to my data analysis by the peer reviewer.

Data Analysis and Validation Procedures

Interviews were used to determine the perceptions of administrators and staff about the antibullying program described in this study. As part of the data analysis process I reviewed the interview transcripts to identify possible themes and patterns among the data. I coded the data according to recurring words and phrases pertaining the strain theory that emerged during the analysis process. I then used open coding to group data into categories. The process of open coding involves identifying different parts of

the data that describe related phenomena and labeling these parts into categories (Lodico et al., 2010). The findings from this study are reported in section 4 in the form of a narrative discussion, following the protocol suggested by Creswell (2012).

Data from the administrators and staff, representing perceptions of two stakeholder groups, along with variation of perceptions within groups, contributed to validation of results through triangulation. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different methods of data collection to ensure that a study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2012). Validity of the data was supported by using the same interview questions for each participant, allowing the same amount of time for each interview and participant, and by reviewing the responses with each participant to ensure that their responses were recorded accurately.

Protection of Participants' Rights

I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any data will be collected (approval #07-17-0080885). In addition, approval was granted by the principal at the target high school and the members of the administration and staff who were involved in the interview process. Each participant received a statement of informed consent that described information about the study, the risks involved, and the fact that participation was strictly voluntary. The consent form described the background of the study and the procedures for participating. The participants in the study were assured that their responses would not be shared with

anyone other than the researcher, and the participants' names and titles would not be divulged unless criminal disclosure had been made by one of the participants. Glesne (2011) explained that privacy and confidentiality are generally the foremost concern for participants, so it is important to reassure the participants that strict confidentiality will be adhered to with respect to their participation in the study. Participants signed the consent form prior to the start of the interview.

Summary

In this study, I analyzed the perceptions of administrators and staff at a secondary school to determine whether the implemented antibullying program adapted from an elementary school curriculum and focus fosters prosocial behavior and reduces aggression, peer harassment, and feelings of strain. A qualitative design using eight participant interviews was conducted. The remaining sections of this paper present the findings of the study and their implications.

Section 4: Results

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in elementary schools in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. In this section, I will review the research questions as well as the setting where the study took place. I will also provide an overview of the data collection process, the data analysis, including data gained from the sample population via the individual interviews. In addition, I will present findings and results in answer to the research questions and evidence of trustworthiness.

In analyzing the data that I had collected, themes emerged from the perceptions of the administrators and staff with respect to the bullying prevention program that is currently in place at the target school. I collected research data through personal interviews to address the following research questions:

1. How do administrators and staff perceive the bullying prevention program at the target school with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain?
2. How does the bullying prevention program at the target school foster prosocial behavior and diminish feelings of strain according to the perceptions of the administrators and staff?
3. Has the bullying prevention program adapted from the elementary level reduced incidences of aggression and peer harassment at the target school?

The sample of participants for the research study included staff members from the target high school, located in a suburb of a major Mid-Atlantic city of the United States. Participants chosen from a random, purposeful sample included five teachers from Grades 9-12, as well as the principal and two assistant principals. There were no conditions such as changes in personnel, budget cuts, or other trauma present at the time of the interviews that could have influenced the participants with respect to their answers and the interpretation of data collected for the study. Participants were not given any type of compensation for assisting with the study, and participation in the research study was strictly voluntary.

After receiving approval from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval #07-17-0080885), I began the data collection process. I conducted personal interviews with each of the participants in a conference room at the school during the month of August as the staff was returning from their summer break. Face-to-face interviews were conducted during the first week of August (August 3 and August 4). I created an interview guide that consisted of five open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed me to yield in-depth responses from the participants regarding their experiences, perceptions, and opinions within the target school setting. The questions also produced sufficient context that was easily interpretable by the participants.

The interview questions (Appendix A) examined the perceptions of the stakeholders with respect to the prevention program fostering prosocial behavior and reducing aggression and peer harassment. I recorded each interview with a digital

recorder, and then downloaded each digital interview to a USB drive to safely secure the data. The USB drive is securely stored in a safety deposit box located within my home. According to Bailey (2008), transcription involves the close observation of data through repeated careful listening. My transcription process included utilizing listening skills, analytical thought, and interpretation.

Hatch (2002) said that analysis is the most critical part of the research process. My transcription process included listening to each of the interview recordings numerous times. I spent approximately four to five hours typing each interview transcript using the verbatim transcription approach so that I could accurately interpret and represent the data from each interview. Using verbatim transcription required me to produce interview transcripts that corresponded word-for-word with what was spoken by each participant from the audio recordings of each interview. The confidentiality of the participants was protected by assigning a pseudonym to each one of them (M plus a number or F plus a number/gender specific) that was maintained throughout the research process.

The interview process occurred on participants' choice of two possible dates. The interviews were conducted in a conference room at the target high school and lasted approximately 30 minutes for each one. I recorded the interviews with a hand-held digital recording device and I also took paper-and-pencil notes. The interviews were one-on-one with each participant and myself, and after each interview was completed, I verified the responses of the participants from the taped session to clarify their responses for my documentation. After the completion of the interviews, I transcribed each interview and

checked my notes against the transcript. Every participant received a summary of their interview transcripts. This member checking allowed the participants to review the data for accuracy for authenticity. There were no variations in the original data collection plan nor did any unusual circumstances arise during the data collection stage.

Findings

The qualitative data acquired through the study were integrated through a case study design in which I examined data from interviews conducted with a random purposeful sampling of the school's staff. The first part of my data analysis was to categorize and analyze the research data.

After reading through the interview transcripts numerous times, I examined the findings in the interview transcripts to understand what the participants had expressed through the data. Creswell (2013) suggested that all written transcripts need to be read numerous times for clarity, coding, and deducing in order to search for deeper meanings from the anticipated codes. Through my examination of the transcripts, I was able to extract general concepts and patterns from the data.

I used open coding to organize my data and to analyze the data for the emergence of significant concepts and patterns. Open coding requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because in the beginning, analysts want to open the data to all potentials and possibilities (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I identified key concepts and themes relevant to the strain theory and established them as codes. Concepts were manually assigned a code only if they were present in multiple interview transcripts. To assist with the manual

coding, post-it notes, or memos were used during the transcribing process to identify the concepts that had surfaced. The emergent codes that were identified included (a) mentoring program, (b) prosocial behavior, (c) student/adult interactions, (d) peer-to-peer interactions, (e) sense of purpose, (f) accountability and responsibility, (g) goals, (h) positive environment, (i) sense of community, and (j) student feelings. The codes were then formulated into four associated meanings or themes: (a) relationships, (b) student responsibility, (c) positive culture, and (d) trusting and supportive environment. The research findings were effectively represented because each of the themes were developed according to the responses given by the research participants to the interview questions asked of them. Subsequently, each theme contributed to the findings for each of the three research questions. What follows is a presentation of the findings, organized by theme.

Relationships

One of the first themes that emerged from the research findings was relationships. The participants all expressed the idea that because students were given the opportunity to create relationships with staff members and peers through the mentoring component of the bullying prevention program, they appeared to increase their prosocial behavior and exhibit reduced feelings of strain.

Through the mentoring program, teachers provide positive reinforcement to students through discussions and by serving as role models. Mentoring time takes place in a low-key, low stress environment, in small groups. Teachers choose the group of

students that they will mentor for the entire year. One participant, M6, stated “The mentoring program has taught the students to treat people with respect and dignity, and now students look after one another and take care of one another.” Another participant, F7, noted that “The mentoring program has taught students how to have an awareness of the feelings and actions of others.” Each mentoring group is representative of a cross-section of the student body. Students can interact with other students whom they may never have met. Both M3 and M8 expressed the sentiment regarding how the program allows the students to build relationships with other students who they may not have contact with otherwise.

Teachers are responsible for conveying messages of antibullying and positive behavior through the Olweus lessons as well as through the mentoring program. Participant M3 commented, “The mentoring program has a goal setting component. The goal setting helps students to plan goals and to plan where they want to get to. By planning their goals, it has helped them to eliminate strain.” According to M1, “The mentoring program has also helped the students to communicate with one another and to talk to one another as people.” During mentoring time, the students have discussions on topics that relate to real world problems, such as dating violence as well as discussions regarding good decisions. Participant M1 stated that “the mentoring program has enabled the students to be empathetic towards others as well as more accepting, and the staff has noticed students helping each other more in the hallways, at lunch, and on the bus.” The

overall climate of the building changed due to the positive actions and the acceptance that was displayed by the students.

Participant M3 acknowledged that the students are beginning to understand that people are people. As the students recognized that their peers had feelings and they got to know their peers as individuals, it became more difficult for them to bully or harass others. According to M3, “Alleviating strain is occurring through the relationships that the students are building with their peers and staff members. The adults in the building are being viewed as role models who help the students get through their feelings of strain.” The relationships are serving as an outlet for the students to recognize and deal with their feelings.

Student Responsibility

The second theme that emerged from the research findings was student responsibility. The mentoring program teaches students to focus on the positive instead of the negative as well as teaching the students how to behave appropriately. The program uses open discussions with the students to talk about making good decisions, which allows the teachers to encourage positive behavior. Participant F5 noted that “Students are stepping up and changing their behavior. They want to do positive things; They are no longer afraid to be involved, and they want to stay out of the principals’ offices.” In addition, M8 noted that, “The goal setting component of the mentoring program helps students to plan goals and where they want to get their goals, it helps them to address and eliminate strain through positive actions. By planning their goals, it helps them to

address and eliminate strain through positive actions.” The goals portion of the mentoring program allowed the students to gain confidence and feelings of self-esteem.

According to M3, students are becoming more aware of what is going on within the school community. Students are trying to be proactive instead of reactive. “Students are no longer engaging as bystanders and taking videos of fights, but instead, they try to stop altercations when they see them happening. The students have started to genuinely care about one another.” Participant F4 noted that,

Students are stepping up and helping one another more. If they see someone sitting alone at lunch, they will sit with them; if they see someone drop their books, they will help the student to pick up the books. They have an awareness of how others respond to negative actions.

According to F5,

The teachers have been talking to the students about doing good within the school environment. The students are encouraged to do things in the school that will lift the spirit of the school such as planting flowers outside to beautify the campus, writing letters to the custodians and secretaries to thank them for their hard work, and making cookies for staff members to show that they are appreciated.

Participant M2 stated “We are seeing students stepping in to help situations of aggression and harassment. Students are no longer standing by watching and not doing anything. Students are now taking initiative and behaving in a proactive manner.” F7 stated,

“Students now want to stay out of the principals’ offices. They are trying to avoid drama and instead are trying to do the right thing.” According to F5, “The atmosphere of the school has become more positive. Students are no longer afraid to be involved. They are not taking action and are trying to act more responsible by helping one another.” As the students became more accepting and understanding of one another, they recognized their peers as people. This recognition altered the mindset and behavior of the students.

According to M1, the students have helped to create a peer-to-peer component of the program that was implemented during the 2017-2018 school year. This component has allowed the junior and seniors to act as mentors and to assist all freshmen and new students to the district. M1 explained that the new peer-to-peer component was added to the mentoring program because the students felt that it should be their responsibility to assist freshmen and new students to the district by helping them adjust to life at their school. M1 explained, “The students felt that they could share their experiences and offer their expertise with such topics such as academic classes, athletics, clubs, etc.” It has also served as a way for the student body to showcase the positive attributes of their school.

Positive Culture

Another theme that emerged through the data findings was the positive culture that developed throughout the school environment. Each participant commented that as the behavior of the students became more positive, the school environment also materialized into a more positive environment. One participant, F5, stated that “By

focusing on positive behavior and moving away from negative behavior, an atmosphere of positivity has been created within the school.” Participant F7 noted that,

The bullying prevention program and the mentoring component have taught students how to have an awareness of the feelings and actions of others. The program has moved away from the traditional lessons on bullying behavior and instead focuses on positive behavior.

According to F4,

The staff has been more positive about the program which has also helped to change the attitude of the students. At first, the staff was hesitant and afraid of the mentoring program, but they have now embraced the program. The guidance counselors and the principals have also been helpful with the program. The program has also received positive comments from the parents.

Another participant, M6, noted that “Since the inception of the program, there has been a noticeable difference, a positive difference, within the school regarding how the students interact and treat one another.” Participant M6 stated,

There is an awareness of how the students respond to negativity. By acting in ways that are helpful, the students are assisting those students who may be experiencing strain. Students are more inclusive and less exclusive of one another. Students are following the lead of others who are doing

positive and not negative things in the school. The program has changed the culture of the school as well.

Adding to the sentiment expressed by M6, F5 noted “The culture that has emerged in the school is one where students are accepting of one another and take care of one another. Students who you never thought would take the initiative to help out have become extremely proactive.” According to F7, “The Olweus and mentoring programs have taught students how to have an awareness of the feelings and actions of others. The program has moved away from bullying behavior and instead focuses on positive behavior.” The focus on positive rather than negative behavior has resulted in a school climate where empathy flows freely.

Participant M8 stated “The students are change agents. They are actively trying to find ways to help one another through the positive decisions that they make. The students have taken ownership and pride in their building.” As F5 noted, “There is a positive vibe throughout the building. Part of the culture that is being pushed revolves around the students being accepting of one another and treating one another as people.” With respect to the positive behavior cited by the participants above, Participant M6 also noted,

There is a marked change in how students respond to what they see other students doing. For example, in lunch, students make sure that no student is excluded from others or sitting by themselves. Students are being

followers of good things rather than bad things. Students are making good decisions with positive behaviors rather than relying on negative behavior.

The students have an awareness of how others respond to negative actions.

The open communication and awareness of others' feelings among the student body and staff has helped to create a positive culture within the target school. As the bullying prevention program continues, target school staff are hopeful that the students will continue to be change agents and positively affect the school environment.

Trusting and Supportive Environment

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the research findings was the trusting and supportive environment that had materialized in the educational environment. The mentoring component of the bullying prevention program allowed the students to have a venue for open discussions concerning how to treat people with respect and dignity occurred. F7 stated, "The open discussions allow the students to look at themselves and to see that they are not the only ones that have problems." M8 concurred with the sentiments of F7 by explaining, "Through the open discussions, the students are seeing that they are not alone, and there are others who share the same problems with them." According to M6,

Because of the mentoring program, the students are now taking care of one another and forming relationships with others who they would not normally have

the opportunity to socialize with, and they have learned how to treat one another as people; the culture of the building has begun to change.

The research participants each noted that the staff has begun to see the mindset of the students changing. For example, they have noticed students helping one another more, and there has been a decrease in cliques since there is more interaction among all students. M1 commented that

While walking through the hallways, you will see students helping one another; students make sure that no one has to eat alone during lunch; and you will see students cheering for one another at events; there is more camaraderie than ever before among the student body.

M3 found that “The climate of the building is such that the students are now caring for their peers and viewing them as people.” With respect to the staff and their participation in the program, F4 stated,

The staff has been more positive about the program which has also helped to change the attitude of the students. At first, the staff was hesitant and afraid of the mentoring program, but they have now embraced the program. The guidance counselors and the principals have also been helpful with the program.

Participant comments suggest that in creating a positive, empathetic climate at the school, a positive feedback loop emerged by which positive staff interactions resulted in positive student interactions, which then resulted additional positive perceptions from staff.

Each research participant noted that the students see the teachers are dedicated to the program, and the teachers have embraced their new role as “mentors” for the students. The mentoring program allows the students to discuss their feelings and to rely on others for help. According to M2,

The program has helped to promote confidence with the students. In addition, it has allowed the students to have adults that they can talk to about things. They also feel that the mentoring component has enabled the students to understand that the staff is more aware and active about what is going on in the building.

F7 commented, “Students have started coming to teachers to report problems or to tell the teachers about other students who may need help. The mentoring program has helped to build “communities” within the school.” According to M3, “There is a change in how students respond to what they see and how they feel. Students are trying to do good things throughout the school. There is an awareness of how they respond to negative things.” The students demonstrate empathy and genuinely care about the well-being of their peers.

The participants commented that the program has also received positive comments from the parents, and that the entire staff feels that the school environment has become a positive environment, which has allowed the students to feel more comfortable in the school. The four themes of relationships, student responsibility, positive culture,

and trusting and supportive environment contribute to the answering of the research questions, which is presented next.

Results

In this section, I will address each of my three research questions and how the data that I obtained supported my findings. The themes just presented inform these results.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: How do administrators and staff perceive the bullying prevention program at the target school with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain? Overall, the participants agreed that the bullying prevention program was making positive changes and reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. As previously discussed in the theme of positive culture, the program has done a good job changing the mindset of the students. The program has evolved and is no longer just about bullying. Positive behaviors and “doing the right thing” are now being emphasized and students are more proactive; thus, the atmosphere of the school has also become more positive. In addition, the culture of the school has also begun to change. Students have become more accepting and supportive of one another. If they see someone with a problem, they react by trying to help or by enlisting the help of adults.” The students have become more attuned to the needs and feelings of their peers.

The participants noted that they feel the students are more open with respect to discussing their thoughts and feelings. They believe that the students are accustomed to discussing sensitive topics and issues as well as expressing their feelings. The participants have experienced students coming to them to report problems or to tell them about students who may need help. The participants echoed the fact that the students have become more aware of what is going on in their classmates' lives, something that was not visible prior to the implementation of the bullying prevention program.

Each of the research participants discussed how the mentoring program has provided an open discussion environment for students who may be experiencing feelings of strain. Through the open dialogue that occurs during the mentoring component of the program, the students have been able to discuss their feelings and to rely on others for help. The participants also expressed that the program has helped to promote confidence within the students. It has shown the students that their peers have compassion for them and want to help them, and that they are not going through their problems alone.

As discussed earlier in relation to the theme of relationships, students are opening up more during the group discussions and open dialogues. The program has provided a level of comfort for the students. The students know that they can talk about how they feel, and they also know that their peers will be compassionate and understanding towards them. The students are able to talk about their decisions and why they have made the decisions instead of just doing what someone tells them to do. The mentoring program also gives the students who are experiencing feelings of strain positive adult role

models (the staff) who are able to help them in sharing their feelings. The mentoring program has helped the students to feel more open talking with their peers and adults about things.

As previously found in relation to theme of student responsibility, students are trying to do good things throughout the school. There is an awareness of how they respond to negative events and individuals. The focus is now on acting in a positive manner. By acting in ways that are helpful, the students are assisting those students who may be experiencing strain.

Several of the participants discussed how the students who are experiencing strain have an outlet available for sharing their feelings. Students have the opportunity to meet with their mentor group twice a month, and they know that they can always talk to their mentors or the guidance counselors individually. The students also have a better understanding of what resources are available to them if needed. In addition to the school guidance counselors, it should be noted that the school utilizes services for the students on a weekly basis from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center mental health services department.

As previously discussed in relation to the theme of positive culture, the program is now referred to as a program about respect, positive decisions, and doing the right thing instead of a bullying program. The focus of the program is on positivity instead of negativity. One tenant of the program added this year that has helped the students tremendously was the addition of a ropes course. Based upon recommendations from the

guidance counselors and teachers, students who have exhibited signs of strain or who have admitted to having feelings of strain are referred to the principals for participation in the ropes course. The students have the opportunity to attend a ropes course, along with school counselors, principals, and other students, where they work further on social relationships, setting goals, and establishing trust. The participants noted that the ropes course has effectively helped the students gain confidence to maintain peer relationships and relationships with staff.

The participants also discussed how the mentoring program has broken down walls of communication between the staff and the students. This has helped students who have experienced strain because they feel more comfortable with the staff and their peers, and they see that they have a support system. In addition, as mentioned with respect to the of theme trusting and supportive environment, the group discussions and open dialogues that have occurred during the mentoring component have led to the discussion of other topics that were not part of the Olweus lessons and have allowed the students to feel more open and confident during the discussions. In summary, these participants perceive the antibullying program positively and ascribe to its positive effects for the students and for school culture.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: How does the bullying prevention program at the target school foster prosocial behavior and diminish feelings of strain according to the perceptions of the administrators and staff? The bullying prevention program at the target

school is comprised of Olweus-based antibullying lessons and a mentoring component. The goal of the program is to focus on the positive, by teaching students how to behave appropriately, how to treat others, and how to express their feelings.

The teachers said that they choose the group of students that they will mentor at the beginning of the year. Each teacher is responsible for approximately 14 students who they meet with twice a month during a 51-minute homeroom period. Each mentoring group is representative of a cross-section of the student body. In addition, the teachers or mentors are also available to meet with any students outside of the planned mentoring times. During mentoring time, the students participate in discussions on topics that relate to real world problems. The Olweus program has tried to steer away from using the word “bullying” and focusing more on positive behavior. Through the mentoring program, the teachers seek to provide positive reinforcement to the students through discussions and by serving as role models for the students.

According to participants in this study, the mentoring program has helped the students to communicate more effectively with one another. The participants discussed how students have learned to talk to one another as people. They have also learned how to build relationships with different types of students that they may not normally have relationships with otherwise.

As previously stated in relation to the theme of relationships, the mentoring program has incorporated a goal setting component that has been beneficial for those students experiencing strain. Through the use of goal setting, the students plan goals and

decide where they want to get to as well as what they want to accomplish. By planning their goals, it enables them to feel less stressed, and to visualize a plan to accomplish their goals, which ultimately eliminates strain. The mentoring component has also taught students how to have an awareness of the feelings and actions of others. Through open discussions, students are learning how to talk about their feelings, which helps them to alleviate strain. The open discussions also allow the students to look at themselves, and to see that they are not the only ones that have problems, which has made them more aware of their feelings and actions.

The mentoring program has allowed the staff to bring together collections of students from different backgrounds who may not, under normal circumstances interact with one another. The staff has found that the mentoring program, through the open discussions that occur, has taught the students to look out for one and to help one another, and they have also seen the mindset of the students begin to change.

As previously discussed with respect to the theme of trusting and supportive environment, students now look out for another and are more willing to help and support others. For example, students alert guidance counselors about other students who may have suicidal thoughts; when a student drops books or other items in the hallway, other students help to pick up the items; and students make sure that no student must sit alone at lunch. The climate of the building is such that the students caring for their peers as people.

The participants each expressed that an open dialogue between the students and the staff has been created through the mentoring component. The students have become more comfortable with the staff through the mentoring component, and now, the students are taking ownership and pride in the building. The students are also more inclined to report incidents of bullying or negative behavior. In addition, since the students understand one another better, they have also begun to make positive decisions and to handle situations in positive, not negative ways.

As previously discussed in relation to the theme of relationships, the students have become more comfortable with the guidance counselors. They have started reporting other students who they feel may be having problems to the guidance counselors as a way to intervene and to help their peers. The students are also more comfortable with reporting problems or reporting other students who may be having issues.

The level of trust has also increased among students with their peers and among students and the staff. The bystander mentality is disappearing; and students are now taking a more proactive attitude. The participants noted that the communication process during the mentoring program has broken down barriers and allowed the students to feel more open and relaxed. The students have become more open and relaxed, and they understand they are not the only ones experiencing problems; there are others just like them that are dealing with the same issues and concerns. In summary, participants in this

study agreed that the antibullying program has fostered prosocial behavior in explicit ways.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: Has the bullying prevention program adapted from the elementary level reduced incidences of aggression and peer harassment at the target school? Each participant in the study stated that they felt that the bullying prevention program has led to a more prosocial school with respect to how students handle situations of peer harassment and aggression. The bullying prevention program has shifted from its original purpose of addressing bullying behavior to now encouraging positive behavior. The participants explained that the word “antibullying,” contributed to an atmosphere of negativity and one in which students may be more inclined to use negative actions. The bullying prevention committee convened, and a decision was made to focus on positive behavior so that the students could be more cognizant of making good decisions and doing the right thing. The participants noted that after the direction and overall concept of the program changed from antibullying to positive behavior, students started coming together and being supportive of one another, and the incidences of aggression and harassment began to diminish.

As previously discussed in relation to the theme of trusting and supportive environment, harassment and aggression are being replaced by students helping each other and doing the right thing. The students have also realized that it is more difficult to

bully or harass others when you understand their feelings. The school has taken on the philosophy that “people are people.”

As discussed earlier regarding the themes of relationships and trusting and supportive environment, the open discussions of the mentoring program have allowed the students to talk about their feelings. Students are more sensitive and attuned to the feelings of their peers. If students are having issues with bullying or harassment, they are more inclined and confident now to speak up and alert someone that is happening. According to the participants, this was something that had never occurred before the prevention program. Students are going to the teachers, principals, and guidance counselors to discuss problems. The level of trust has also increased among students with their peers and among students with the staff. The bystander mentality is disappearing, and students are now taking a more proactive attitude.

As was discussed earlier with relation to the theme of positive culture, the students are seen as change agents. The students actively try find ways to help one another through the positive decisions that they make. The students have also become more accepting of others. Through the discussions that occur in the mentoring groups, the students are learning more about respect, and they see their peers in a different light.

Each participant expressed the sentiment that the students have become followers of good behavior. Students are now making positive decisions instead of relying on negative behavior, and the students have developed an understanding regarding how to respond negative actions such as harassment and aggression.

The participant discussed how they are seeing students come together instead of seeing a divide in the student body. Students no longer are standing by watching and not doing anything. Harassment and aggression are being replaced by students helping each other and doing the right thing. By focusing on positive behavior, students are cognizant about making good decisions and doing the right thing. In summary, participants noted a decrease in anti-social behavior among students but also connected this result to a reframing of the antibullying program to emphasize positive action rather than emphasizing a reduction in negative action.

Summary of the Results

While I expected to find participants who did not believe in the bullying prevention program or found it to be a waste of time, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that all of the participants whom I interviewed believed the program was making a positive difference within the school and among the students. As F4 stated, “The staff has been more positive about the program which has also helped to change the attitude of the students. At first, the staff was hesitant and afraid of the mentoring program, but they have now embraced the program.” I was also genuinely surprised to learn that the staff had embraced the program instead of viewing it as another class that they needed to teach. As M2 explained,

The teachers choose the group of students that they will mentor. By allowing the teachers to choose the students that they will work with and ultimately impact, there has been a positive acceptance of the program by

the teachers, and they truly care about the students and want to help them.

The teachers have done a great job of conveying messages of antibullying and positive behavior.

I was impressed to see how efficient the staff was with respect to engaging the students, encouraging them to open up through the discussions, and creating a level of trust among the student body. Within just a few short years of the program's implementation, the school has been able to transform a program that denoted a negative impression into a program that has positively changed the culture of the building and the mindset of its student body, at least in the eyes of these participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Individual interviews with the research participants were the means for data collection I used in this study. As a way to ensure the quality of my research findings, I employed several strategies. One such method was prolonged engagement. I began my research interviews in August 2017, and I spent four months collecting and analyzing the data findings. I feel that this time frame assured me that all of my data were collected, reviewed, coded, and analyzed successfully. I also kept a private journal in which I documented my thoughts and biases during the research process. I felt that this was necessary given my prior relationship with some of the individuals at the target school.

In addition, I utilized a qualified peer reviewer to examine the data from the interviews to assist me in checking for logical development of themes, conclusions, and recommendations. My peer reviewer was an individual who possesses a doctorate degree,

has published articles in the field of education, and has specialized knowledge with respect to the topic of my research and the field of education.

Consistency in the interview format was achieved by using the same interview questions and interview instrument for each participant, allowing the same amount of time for each interview and participant, and by reviewing the responses with each participant after the interviews were completed to ensure that participant responses were recorded accurately. Each participant received a typed transcript of their interview. Participants had the opportunity to review their individual transcripts, verify my interpretations of the data that they provided to me during the interviews, and then meet with me to either confirm for accuracy or assist me with amending the data.

Summary

This chapter provided analysis in addressing the three research questions and also the four themes that emerged from my research data, of relationships, positive culture, responsibility, and supportive and trusting environment. These results indicate that, for these participants, the school was able to create bullying prevention that has changed the culture of the school and the mindset of its student body while helping the students to alleviate strain and issues of aggression and harassment. Section 5 presents an interpretation of my findings, a discussion regarding the limitations of my study, my recommendations, and implications of my study.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in elementary schools in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. It was my hope that the perceptions of the administrators and staff could assist with identifying aspects of the program in the study that were functioning well and those aspects that were not functioning well. As a result, enhancements could be made to the prevention program to improve its success.

My research indicated that the staff of the target school were able to effectively use the prevention program to engage the students in positive behavior, encourage the students to open up through group discussions, and create a level of trust among the student body. Within just a few short years of the program's implementation and with minor tweaks to the curriculum, the school was able to transform something that once connotated negative impressions into a program that positively changed the culture of the school and the mindset of its student body, according to the interview participants.

Four themes also emerged from my research data: relationships, positive culture, responsibility, and supportive and trusting environment. In addition, each theme contributed to the findings for each of the three research questions. The research results indicated that, for these participants, the school was able to successfully create a bullying prevention protocol that has changed the culture of the school and the mindset of its

student body while helping the students to alleviate strain and issues of aggression and harassment.

In Section 5, I will provide an interpretation of my research findings, discuss the limitations of the study, and offer recommendations for future research. Finally, I will conclude with my closing thoughts and a final message that captures the essence of my study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Three research questions guided my study. Research Question 1 asked: How do administrators and staff perceive the bullying prevention program at the target school with respect to its ability to reduce the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain? As previously mentioned, the participants agreed that the bullying prevention program had made positive changes and reduced the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. The participants' responses gave support to Graham's (2010) research that explained that victims of bullying need interventions that help them develop more positive self-views and that school staff must teach them not to blame themselves for the harassment.

The results also indicated that the program utilized at the target school is comprised of Olweus lessons, a mentoring program, and discussions of real-life topics pertinent to teenaged students, which supports the idea that an effective antibullying program must incorporate antibullying lessons and curriculum into the classroom environment (Goldweber et al., 2013). The participants agreed that the group discussions

have created a trusting and supportive environment for the students, which has been extremely helpful for students who are experiencing feelings of strain. These data illustrate the idea that by creating and maintaining a positive atmosphere, a trusting school climate can function as a form of bullying prevention program (Fais & Felmlee, 2014).

The results indicated that the open dialogue that occurs during the mentoring component of the program has enabled the students to discuss their feelings and to rely on others for help. According to Terry (2010), positive change can occur when strategies facilitate school stakeholders' work together, by initiating building-level change that can improve school climate and allow administrators to deal with anger, aggression, and students' interpersonal problems through alternative channels. The program at the target school illustrates the message of Terry's research in that there is a new focus which highlights acting in a positive manner and which was brought about by the tenets and focus of the program. By acting in ways that are helpful, the students can assist those students who may be experiencing strain. Through my research, I found that the alliance of staff and administrators within the target school has effectively initiated positive change with respect to the culture of the building and the way that students handle situations of bullying as well as feelings of strain.

In Research Question 2, I inquired How does the bullying prevention program at the target school foster prosocial behavior and diminish feelings of strain according to the perceptions of the administrators and staff? According to the interview participants, the

mentoring program has broken down walls of communication between the staff and the students, which has helped students who have experienced strain to feel more comfortable with the staff and their fellow students and helping them to realize that they have a support system. The students to talk out their problems while relying on the assistance of adults and their peers in the school. The conflict resolution program that the target school has created provides training has increased the constructive conflict resolution skills and social competency of students while decreasing reactive and proactive aggression levels. Development of conflict resolution strategies is an important part of an antibullying effort, according to Akgun and Araz (2014).

General strain theory formed the conceptual framework for this study. This theory was formed from the work of Durkheim (1951) and Merton (1938) and the theory of anomie. Durkheim's work focused on the decrease of societal restraint and the strain that resulted at the individual level, and Merton's research studied the cultural imbalance that exists between the goals and the norms of the individuals of society, as cited in Agnew (1997).

As discussed in the literature review, Agnew (2000) contended that strain makes people feel angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, and essentially creates pressure for corrective action as a means to alleviate the bad feelings, the same feelings that victims of bullying often express. Coping mechanisms and the effectiveness of an individual to use them play an important role in how individuals take corrective action towards strain that they experience (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). The target school has created interventions

with respect to helping students deal with feelings of strain. The mentoring program has proved an outlet that provides students with coping resources, coping skills, and social support, to help redirect negative emotions away from deviant behaviors (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). According to Broidy and Agnew, those individuals with a large support network, including family and friends, are less likely to move towards delinquent behavior when managing strain than are people who feel less well supported. The participants noted that the target school recognized that staff needed to implement a program that would provide support to their students while instilling a level of comfort and trust.

The mentoring program has allowed the target school to have an outlet for open discussions for students while helping students to create positive and trusting relationships among each other and staff. The interview participants noted that the communication process during the mentoring program has broken down barriers and allowed the students to feel more open and relaxed. According to Olweus (1991), it is important to create an environment where a student feels free to talk to any teacher and get something helpful out of it.

Research Question 3 asked: Has the bullying prevention program adapted from the elementary level reduced incidences of aggression and peer harassment at the target school? The results from the study indicated that the participants believe that the bullying prevention program has led to a more prosocial school with respect to how students handle situations of peer harassment and aggression. This coincides with the findings of

Marsh et al. (2014), who stated that a positive school climate promotes higher student engagement in school and consequently less aggression.

As discussed previously in the results section, the bullying prevention program at the target school has shifted from its original purpose of addressing bullying behavior to now encouraging positive behavior. The results from the data maintain that harassment and aggression are being replaced by students helping each other and doing the right thing.

This focus on positive behavior has allowed students to be cognizant about making good decisions and making ethical choices, which supports the conceptual framework for the study. Factors such as coping resources, coping skills, social support, constraints to delinquent coping, and adjusting a person's disposition toward delinquency have been argued as key elements in efforts to redirect negative emotions away from deviant behaviors (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). According to Broidy and Agnew (1997), individuals with a large support network are less likely to move towards delinquent behavior when managing strain, while others may navigate towards negative means to correct the bad feelings, generally utilizing an outlet that involves physical aggression. The open discussions and dialogue the target school has implemented through the mentoring program have provided the coping skills and the coping resources for students to find the comfort and trust needed to eliminate negative feelings and actions for those students experiencing strain. The findings pertaining to all three research questions confirm previous literature indicating that the two main purposes of a successful conflict

resolution program are to make the schools safe and to create a caring environment where all students can learn and socialize students while employing the necessary skills to resolve conflicts without aggression or violence (Akgun & Araz, 2014). The prevention program at the target school has taken the tenets of successful conflict resolution programs and adapted them in a manner that promotes positive behavior and empathy instead of aggression and harassment.

Implications for Social Change

Bullying creates anxiety within the school climate and can affect a student's social and interpersonal development (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012). The current research may impact social change by encouraging other secondary schools to assess their bullying prevention programs to determine if the material being used is age-appropriate for secondary students and if the programs are indeed alleviating bullying behavior and strain in their students. Across the country, school districts are being mandated by legislative policies to find ways to stop the spread of bullying in their schools. The policies require schools to emphasize the importance of changing school culture and climate, developing a school-wide approach, and being proactive in combating bullying (Kennedy et al., 2012). However, at the secondary level, many schools lack the tools or resources needed to implement the policies due to the lack of age-appropriate content.

If institutions lack the necessary resources or tools, an atmosphere of normlessness may occur with society (in the case of this study, schools) losing the ability to control the behavior of its members (Durkheim, 1951). Merton (1938) believed that

society holds the same expectations for all members but does not provide an equal opportunity for all members to achieve goals. When students use bullying as an outlet for their strain, this may signal that schools have not provided students with the necessary coping mechanisms needed for dealing with their negative feelings. According to Broidy and Agnew (1997), coping mechanisms and the effectiveness of an individual to use them play an important role in how individuals take corrective action towards strain that they experience. School officials in the 21st century need to recognize this and take the appropriate precautions because students involved in bullying incidents are more likely to experience poor self-esteem, depression, anxiety about going to school, and even suicidal thoughts (Gourneau, 2012). By emphasizing positive behavior and actions rather than negative, school officials can begin to change educational climates into supportive and empathetic environments where students become confident and strong instead of feeling strain and frustration.

Recommendations for Action

There are no simple explanations for bullying; rather it is a complex phenomenon with many causal factors and consequences (Bhukhanwala, 2014). As incidences of bullying, victimization, and relational aggression continue to rise, one way to educate administrators, parents, teachers, and administrators about the phenomena of these topics is through a bullying prevention curriculum (Smith, 2011). The target school in my research study had taken a bullying prevention program designed for elementary-aged children and utilized it in a secondary school setting. After conducting my research, I

found that the target school had modified the original program into a program with age appropriate activities and messages. As a result, I recommend the following actions to the district:

- Continue implementing the prevention program at the target school and making revisions as necessary;
- Share the contents of the program with other buildings in the district, especially the middle school;
- Continue meeting with the program committee on a regular basis to discuss changes or recommendations for the monthly discussion topics and lessons;
- Include students on the committee to assist with discussion ideas and topics for lessons;
- Expand upon the mentoring program each year and discuss variations of mentoring that can be utilized as part of the program; and
- Provide professional development to the staff on topics such as strain and mentoring techniques.

I believe that the results of my study should be shared with the superintendent of the target school's district as well as the staff of the target school. The results of the study will be made available to these individuals via email.

Recommendations for Further Study

My research study was designed to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program, originally created for use in

elementary schools, in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. As discussed previously, one limitation of my study was that I was bound to research generated from the administrators and staff of the building and my research did not incorporate data from students and parents. A future study might be done that would examine not only the perceptions of the students regarding the prevention program, but the perceptions of their parents regarding how they view the prevention program with respect to reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain.

The second recommendation for a future study would be to conduct a similar research study in more than one school. A study could examine similar districts perhaps suburban districts of the same size or rural districts and then compare the results of those studies. Although substantial results were generated from my research study, utilizing only one school may limit generalizability.

The final recommendation that I would make for a future study would be to conduct similar research but using a mixed-methods design. By utilizing a mixed-methods study, I feel that a researcher could then incorporate surveys to analyze the effectiveness of the program by examining the perceptions and also the number of discipline referrals pertaining to strain and aggression before and after a prevention program was implemented.

Summary

I conducted this study to determine the perceptions held by secondary administrators and staff of an antibullying program originally created for use in

elementary schools in reducing the incidence of bullying behavior and feelings of strain. My findings indicated the program that was currently in place at the target school revolves around four main themes: relationships, student responsibility, positive culture, and trusting and supportive environment.

The importance of bullying prevention programs can be seen through the power expressed by the four themes above as well as through the powerful mentoring component of the program. I found that the mentoring component eloquently transcends the themes of the target school's program. The mentoring component of the bullying prevention program allows students to have a venue for open discussions concerning how to treat people with respect and dignity. It also teaches students to focus on the positive instead of the negative as well as teaching the students how to behave appropriately. The program uses open discussions about making good decisions, which allows the teachers to encourage positive behavior. Through the mentoring program, teachers provide positive reinforcement to students by serving as role models, which increases prosocial behavior and reduces feelings of strain with the students. A curriculum that incorporates such activities as group discussions and guest speakers and lessons such as the ones used in the target school help to foster respect and tolerance with respect to cultural differences.

The teaching of antibullying behaviors may also foster such positive behaviors as accountability and responsibility, as was the case in the target school. As educators continue their journey through the 21st century, the goal of administrators and teachers

should be to create a learning where the environment is one where safety prevails, students develop positive social skills, and students learn how to solve conflicts peacefully.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are some of the components of the bullying prevention program that you feel produce prosocial behavior and reduce feelings of strain in the students?
2. Have you noticed a difference with respect to the behavior of the students and how they interact with one another since the inception of the antibullying program? If so, please provide examples.
3. Has the program led to a more prosocial school climate with respect to how students handle situations of peer harassment and aggression? Why or why not?
4. Has the program led to a more prosocial school climate with respect to how students handle feelings of strain? Why or why not?
5. What changes, if any, would you suggest make to the program, and why would you make those changes to the antibullying program?