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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Antibullying Programs in a U.S. Middle School

by

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LLM, University of Baltimore, 2010

BL, Nigerian Law School, 1992

LLB, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy Administration

Walden University

April 2019

Abstract

School bullying has become a serious issue in U.S. schools, with children being harassed, hurt, and even killed or driven to suicide or homicide as a result of being bullied. Bullying in schools has persisted despite the various intervention measures taken to curtail the phenomenon. The purpose of this phenomenological exploration was to explore how teachers and principals at a U.S. middle school perceive the school's existing bullying programs and elicit recommendations about how to improve the programs. The theoretical basis of this investigation was Bandura's social learning theory. Data were collected through interviews with 4 principles and 6 teachers. Interview data were transcribed, and then coded and analyzed using a modified Van Kaam procedure, as revised by Moustakas. Nine themes emerged from the data analysis that encompassed participants' perceptions of the causes of bullying and how teachers and principals can help to prevent bullying. The key finding is that teachers reported that more professional training to reduce bullying is needed. Additionally, social learning theory is explanatory of participant experiences as they noted that encouraging positive behavior, kindness, and empathy in the classroom will help minimize bullying conduct in schools. This study may foster societal change by providing insight to educational leaders about how to improve antibullying programs, which may lead to reductions in school dropout rates, incidents of homicide and suicide as a result of school bullying, and other antisocial behaviors associated with school bullying.

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Dedication

First, I bestow my study to Jesus Christ my Lord and Redeemer for his mercies. To my husband, Godspower Uzoma, your love, support, and motivation made this work a reality. To my sons, Ike, Abani, Truman, Denning, and Kennedy, for all your understanding, love, cleverness, sanguinity, and comicality. They are my number one fans. Also, to my father, Chief Akani Abani, and my mom, Mrs. Mabel Ogeri Abani (of blessed memory) my educational pillars, they instilled in me the principle of reading. They made me appreciate the value of education. I give God the praise that my dad is alive to see me achieve this milestone in life. To my late sister, Uche Abani, who inspired and encouraged me greatly in my academic journey. She was a lawyer with the Ministry of Justice, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Bullying is an ongoing and recurring problem in U.S. schools, which is characterized by antagonistic and aggressive conduct (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016; Goryl, Neilsen-Hewett, & Sweller, 2013). It is a socially constructed and perpetuated phenomenon which has a devastating effect on the victim, the bully, and the larger society (Hymel, McClure, Miller, Shumka, & Trach, 2015; Lester, Cross, Dooley, & Shaw, 2013; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013). The frequent occurrence of bullying in U.S. schools has made it a serious public policy concern (Englehart, 2014; Hymel et al., 2015). Students have skipped school, dropped out of school, and have even committed suicide or homicide because of bullying (Englehart, 2014; Lester et al., 2013; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013).

Policymakers have devised various programs to address the problem of school bullying in the United States (Englehart, 2014; Hymel et al., 2015). Several antibullying programs have emerged and been implemented in U.S. schools; however, the effectiveness of these programs has not been determined (Hymel et al., 2015). Despite the existence of bullying deterrence policies and programs, school bullying is still rampant in U.S. schools. Recently, on the 25th of March 2019, a 10 years old girl in an Elementary school in South Carolina was airlifted after a classroom fight. She died two days after the incident. The girl's mother alleged that she reported severally to the school authority of her daughter being bullied and no action was taken by the school (Sharif, 2019, p. 4). Also, in the Texas high school shooting where 10 persons were killed and 10 persons

wounded in 2018. The shooter was alleged to have been bullied by his mates and some of

his coaches who told that him that he sinks (Williams, Blankstein, Dienst & Siemaszko,

2018). From these cases it's obvious that bullying is destructive and urgent measures

have to been taken to stop it in our school campuses.

Therefore, exploring the topic of school bullying is essential, especially

considering the negative implications it has for students and the greater society. A

number of theories have also been presented in this regard. According to social learning

theory, an individual's behavior or actions (e.g., bullying) are an outcome of lessons

learned from observing and imitating social occurrences experienced within an

individual's environment (Bandura, 1989). In line with this theory, the principal focus of

this investigation was the role of the school personnel in effecting a nonviolent school

atmosphere for students — and experiences of middle-school teachers and

principals/administrators related to bullying.

Furthermore, I sought to examine the various consequences of bullying and to

recommend measures that may help decrease bullying in schools. The study may reveal

contributory issues related to the persistence of school bullying that school

administrators, policy makers and principals can use to develop effective intervention

programs for bullying in the school environment. The advancement of more effective

deterrence curricula to lessen cases of school bullying may contribute to a reduction in

bullying behavior.

In Chapter 1, I provide an in-depth discussion of the topic and the problem

addressed in this investigation. I provide background information on the phenomenon of

school bullying to enable readers to understand the topic better. The purpose statement and research questions are also addressed in the chapter. The other segments of this chapter are (a) the theoretical framework, (b) the nature of the study, (c) definitions, (d) assumptions, (e) scope and delimitations, (f) limitations, and (g) significance of the study.

Background

Bullying is defined as the calculated and constant infliction of any bodily and emotional aggression towards a person or a group of persons (Neiman, Robers, & Robers, 2012). According to Mundbjerg, Nielsen, and Simonsen (2014), the occurrence of bullying varies from one person to another as some individuals are continually exposed to an adverse action, or actions, of another individual or group of individuals. Still, another researcher defined bullying as "a complex and damaging form of ill-treatment, predominant across societal locations and around the world" (Srabstein, 2013, p. 378). Acts of bullying include cases of humiliation, teasing, name-calling, threatening, harassment, taunting, social isolation, and gossiping (Englehart, 2014; Neiman et al., 2012). In bullying, the aggressor is more powerful than his or her victim, thus, making it easier for the aggressor to abuse that power at the expense of the victim.

Bullying is an ongoing problem in schools in the United States (Englehart, 2014; Hymel et al., 2015). In one study carried out in the United States during 2008, researchers found that from middle through high school, 56% of students had seen a student being bullied, and 71% knew of a student who had been bullied (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). Because of the high number of cases, the problem of bullying conduct has drawn the attention of school specialists and society alike (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). In one case, a

special needs student in Rochester, New York, was allegedly forced to drink his own urine from a toilet (Taboola, 2015). The three high school students who committed the bullying recorded the bullying incident and posted it on social media (Taboola, 2015). In March 2015, the three high school students were charged with a misdemeanor.

In another example, a college freshman named Jaylen Fryberg went on a shooting spree, killing himself and two other students. Padilla, (2014) stated that according to a fellow student 2 weeks before the incident, Fryberg fought a classmate after learning that the classmate had made a racist remark about him (para. 3). In April 2014, a sixth grader at a Denver middle school committed suicide after experiencing intense bullying at school, in which students made fun of her because of the scar on her face and called her "Gorilla Scarface" (Padilla, 2014). Thus, it can be concluded that bullying practice can result in catastrophic events.

Lawmakers in some states, including Maryland, are trying to investigate the issue of school bullying and bullying over the Internet, or cyberbullying, by enacting various laws and policies. A New York proposal on bullying asserts that any type of bullying behavior will not only be investigated but will also follow disciplinary action, potentially including police involvement (Dupper, 2013). The Internet promotes anonymity; in the case of cyberbullying, there may never be a face-to-face encounter (Negi & Magre, 2019). One fear is that online bullying may be protected under the current, but the somewhat soft standard of free speech; leading to violence, as articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* (1942). Under *Chaplinsky*'s highly specific standards, it is nearly impossible to say whether violence is a potential outcome

of cyberbullying or not. As a result, several Internet bullying cases have resulted in deaths without punishment (No Bullying, 2015). Many cases that are well publicized have prompted political action, which has led lawmakers in many states to adopt bullying prevention laws for public schools that include cyberbullying (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012).

The premise of social learning theory says that individuals' conduct is a result of what they have observed from the people around them (Bandura, 1989). Similarly, social bond theory and self-control theory highlight the importance of having a good relationship with other people within an individual's environment to prevent someone from committing harmful acts, such as bullying, and even criminal offenses against another individual (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 2004). Similarly, factors such as the vulnerability of the target, family support system, and past bullying encounters may produce various outcomes in different settings (Bandura, 1989). It is clear that social relations have an impact on the behavior of individuals.

The people who face aggressive behaviors at educational institutes may react violently. In Nevada, the Sparks Middle School shooting of 2013 left two dead, including the suspect, and two others wounded. According to the suspect's medical report, the suspect stated that he was being bullied at school. He was called "gay" and was teased about "peeing on his pants" ("Sparks Middle School Shooting," 2014, para. 4). Then, the recent school shooting in Texas, afore-stated where the shooter was said to have been bullied by the students and other school officials. According to one of his classmates, an athletic coach and other people in the school had treated the shooter poorly by teasing him that he "smelled bad" (Williams et al., 2018). These cases emphasize the outcome of

individual responses to aggressive conduct in line with Bandura's social learning theory which highlights the importance of individual reaction to negative conduct. For this reason, social learning theory was helpful in understanding the impact of aggressive conduct in the school environment.

Based on my research, a gap exists in the literature with respect to comprehending the perception of the school teachers and principals/administrators in managing school bullying. Furthermore, most of the existing bullying prevention programs have not been empirically and systematically reviewed for effectiveness (Englehart, 2014). Understanding and complying with state laws for antibullying mandates are just the first steps to minimizing the occurrence of bullying (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). According to experts, there is a need to explore further the factors that affect the occurrence of bullying to become more effective at mitigating or reducing these factors (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012). For this study, the focus was on a middle school.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that bullying in U.S. schools has persisted despite the various intervention measures taken to curtain the phenomenon (Englehart, 2014; O'Malley & Lowery, 2014). Scholars have shown that bullying in the nation's schools is still prevalent because of the ineffective measures that have been taken to mitigate these incidents (Hymel et al., 2014). In addition, studies that revealed the simultaneous and continuing consequences of bullying conduct for both bullies and victims such as depression, anxiety, anger, frustration etc. (Hit ymel & Swearer, 2015; McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2013; Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). Experts have found that children

who experience bullying may become emotionally unbalanced and may be unable to form long-lasting relationships (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Researchers continue to explore and investigate the most effective ways to address bullying (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Despite measures beginning in 2005 with the Safe Schools Reporting Act, bullying is increasing (O'Malley & Lowery, 2014). According to O'Malley and Lowery (2014), there were 5,255 instances of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the 2012-2013 school year (p. 4). From the forgoing, bullying with its attendant consequences should be taken seriously and the needed bullying program be enacted.

According to Bandura (1989), the members of the societies to which an individual belongs are influential to a person's preferences, beliefs, and actions. As discussed further in the "Theoretical Framework" section, I used Bandura's social learning theory to explore the issue of bullying. I investigated how members of different social groups within a student's environment perceive and experience school bullying. By interviewing teachers, counselors, administrators, and principals--all of whom constitute part of a student's environment—I was better able to understand the phenomenon of bullying and evaluate the success of the target school's bullying prevention program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions and experiences of bullying of teachers, and principals/ administrators at the chosen middle school and evaluate the success of the school's bullying prevention program. I explored these individuals' perceptions and experiences of bullying because doing so aligned with the research problem and topic of the study. I determined that a qualitative phenomenological

research design was appropriate for this study because of my focus on the experiences and insights of individuals belonging to the same social group (middle school teachers and principals) who have had the same experiences (see Yin, 2014). Findings from this study may provide input to educational leaders and policymakers that they can use to develop effective programs for preventing school bullying. The results could foster constructive social change by showing how school personnel might manage the occurrences of bullying within the school setting and develop programs that could effectively reduce bullying.

Research Questions

For this study, I addressed the following primary research question (RQ1) and secondary sub-questions (SRQ1 and SRQ2):

RQ1. How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying at a middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory?

SRQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

SRQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

For the theoretical framework for this study, I drew primarily from Bandura's (1989) social learning theory. Social bond (Cho, 2015; Hirschi, 1969) and self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 2004) theories also were part of the framework. Social learning theory suggests that aggressive conduct stems from learned behaviors and

observed conduct (Bandura, 1989). The theory posits that children learn aggressive behavior through imitation and that they are exposed to such damaging activities through violent media content or peer influence (Bandura, 1989). According to this theory, children model behavior to which they have been exposed, both positive and negative. Bandura referred to this process as *encoding*. Reinforcement, which can also be positive or negative, tends to strengthen tendencies for such behavior (Bandura, 1989; Bandura & Walters, 1972).

Social bond theory, which is an extension of social learning theory, is the most frequently tested and empirically supported theory for explaining human defiance and crime commission, according to Cho (2015). The main proposition of social bond theory is that having a strong social integration may act as a deterrent to criminal behavior (Hirschi, 1969). Hirschi in 1969 developed social bond theory based on early sociological theorizing and empirical research, such as social learning theory, which gives prominence to the environment as an influencer on behavior and the belief system of an individual (see Bandura, 1989; Bandura & Walters, 1972). The social bond theory implies the significance of having a helpful social environment in maintaining the intentions of individuals as defiance-free and crime-free (Cho, 2015; Hirschi, 1969). It means that good social relations play a conducive role in maintain an environment where there are less chances of bullying.

Hirschi (2004) found that perceptions of self-control are not based on personality. Instead, individuals perceive self-control based on social factors (Hirschi, 2004). Self-control refers to a set of self-imposed elements that serve as inhibitors to the actor when

considering the total array of potential costs associated with a given act (Hirschi, 2004). In a reexamination of self-control theory, Hirschi (2005) explained that self-control has roots in social bond theory. The two theories have their differences, as one focuses on social bonds, while the other is focused on self-control. Nevertheless, both integrate the conventional view of hedonism, pain aversion, and the sane nature of human beings to present how these factors serve as inhibitions to behaviors of crime and deviance (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory indicated that aggression, which is a primary factor in bullying is associated with a lack of involvement in a community or society and is even more so related to poor parenting (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this investigation required the use of a qualitative phenomenology methodology. I used the qualitative method and employed the phenomenological design. A qualitative method is suitable for studies that require the investigation of an event within its natural environment (Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). Qualitative research gives voice to participants involved in an occurrence taking place in their natural setting (Schilling, 2013). Phenomenology adds experience to the voice of the participants on the research issue taking place in their locality as well (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenology research, the experience of the participant to the research issue is crucial in answering the research questions. The study participants having experience and knowledge of the research issue is a key factor in phenomenological study. In line with phenomenology, I explored the participants' experience of the phenomenon of bullying. The participants

were all schoolteachers and principals who were experienced in school bullying, having witnessed the occurrence of the phenomenon in the school. I collected data from participants via their responses to the study questions.

The issue of focus for this exploration was the experiences of the study's participants, and the role they play in mitigating school bullying by being members of the student's social circles. The exploration was done by examining the themes and patterns developed from their responses to the study questions. The teachers and principals' experiences were collected through face-to-face interviews, and open-ended questions were utilized. The questions fixated on gathering the experiences of the participants, considering the seriousness of school bullying, compassion for those bullied, the probability of intervention, and the deterrence method used. A phenomenological design was a suitable choice as it presented the prospect of gaining an understanding of school bullying through interviews utilizing the experiences of schoolteachers and principals who have witnessed the occurrences of bullying conduct in school.

The qualitative phenomenological method was the appropriate procedure for analyzing a vital occurrence within actual life setting by investigating the experiences of the study participants concerning the existence of school bullying, the role the participants played in preventing school bullying, and the school bullying deterrence program. By employing a phenomenological strategy, the investigator comprehended the participant's experiences, and the meaning attached to the experience, thus constructing a rich understanding of the present study (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). I interviewed 10 participants, all experienced teachers, and principals of a middle school. I provided

awareness of school bullying, the role of the teachers and principals in managing school bullying, and the bullying deterrence program through the experiences and voice of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

The most significant benefit of the phenomenology design is that data are formed on the participants' understandings, built on their lived experiences. With a qualitative phenomenological strategy, the researcher understands and describes individuals' personal experience of the phenomena under study (Moustakas, 1994). In this exploration, using a phenomenological research design enabled me to investigate the phenomenon within its natural environment based on the experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). The aspects of qualitative phenomenology research design that Moustakas (1994) highlighted are of utmost importance to this research. By examining the experience that participants have had with school bullying, the value of such experiences, and their responses to the study questions stemming from their experiences, I answered the research questions and attained meaningful results.

To perform a qualitative phenomenological study, I gathered data from interviews from teachers and principals (RSQ1) who have experienced school bullying by witnessing it and who were affiliated with students who have been involved in school bullying. These individuals have handled cases on bullying in the chosen middle school. For credibility, I performed bracketing, which is the method of acknowledging individual expectations and preconceptions that may affect the data gathering and analysis of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Once again, the phenomenological process was the most suitable research strategy for answering the research questions and addressing the problem statement. The phenomenological method enabled in solving and answering the study questions on school bullying from the viewpoint of teachers and principals' experiences. The phenomenology strategy was the most suitable strategy to comprehend the experience of the participants and their knowledge in the research phenomenon (Murphy, 2013).

Consequently, in this exploration, data was collected from participants who have experienced school bullying, the problem under examination (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Due to the research design, the study participants were able to recount their experiences through their responses to the interview questions (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). In data analysis, I applied epoche before using the Moustakas modified Van Kaam method to avoid personal prejudice and bias, setting aside my own beliefs and idiosyncrasies (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). I used the responses of the participants in understanding how the participants experienced and responded to bullying in the school environment (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam 7 step method of data analysis provided a systematic way of analyzing the phenomenological data as was utilized in this study. Moustakas (1994) posited that the 7 step process was one of the best methods of data analysis in qualitative phenomenology.

Definitions

Bullying: An action causing intimidation or harm that is often performed by someone of superior size or strength over one perceived as weaker (National Conferences of State Legislatures, 2014).

Bystander: An individual who observed bullying occurrences (Murphy, 2013).

Cyberbullying: The use of information and communication technology via the phone and social media such as Facebook and Twitter to bully people (Negi & Magre, 2019).

Physical bullying: Aggressive conduct that includes striking, issuing blows, pushing, spitting, hitting, or beating someone (Olweus, 1994).

Social bullying: Behavior that entails activities such as gossiping or spreading a negative rumor about somebody's character; social bullying is often difficult to categorize (Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

Social bond theory: A theory that posits that behavior is impacted by connections to community, society, or family and that deficiency in these relationships can produce undesirable behavior (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2011).

Social learning theory: A theory that postulates that behavior is learned by observation, modeling, and reinforcement—either positive or negative (McLeod, 2011).

Verbal bullying: Behavior that encompasses name-calling, making signs that will make a mockery of a person, and making a person feel upset (Olweus, 1994).

Assumptions

Many assumptions added to the foundation of this qualitative phenomenological study. The foremost assumption is if the participants would be honest in responding to the questions conscientiously; this is assumed because the participants are the only source of data for the study. Nevertheless, those participating were reminded that they should answer the questions honestly. The next assumption was if the research sample of

school representatives (e.g., teachers and principals/ administrators), who had experience of school bullying and had an affiliation with students involved in bullying cases in the middle school would be truthful in their responses to the questions.

The third assumption is that those participating in the research engaged in adequate interaction with the students and that they can recall information and describe their experience with enough detail. Nonetheless, this must be assumed because the level of affinity with the students is not included in the scope of the study. Hence, the groups of social circles chosen are made up of individuals engaged in daily interactions with the students in school.

Scope and Delimitations

The extent and limitations included a discussion on any primary components of the exploration that affects its application. The first delimitation is that the participants (e.g., teachers and principals/administrators) were only those who had an association with middle school students who experienced bullying within one school. Other than these individuals, no other social groups were included in the study. The second delimitation is that, to facilitate the best representation possible, participants were asked additional questions, to offer greater comprehension of the responses, where necessary or applicable. Because the focus of the study is on a specific population, transferability was improved by providing complete details of the methodology implemented in this study. In this manner, future researchers may replicate the method for use within another group or population.

Limitations

The study also included several limitations. Primarily, the execution of the findings and the transferability of the exploration were restricted to participants that have comparable features to the ones discussed in this study. The outcomes are not generalizable to another group. In addressing this, the details of the methodology were provided incomplete form so that future-researchers would replicate the study to other relevant and related populations. Additionally, those participating in the exploration did not know me prior to the exploration, which could have led to fewer participants available for information sharing because of the absence of familiarity. I was careful in arranging meetings with each participant to discuss the aim and nature of the study prior to conducting the interviews. Participants were advised to offer as much ample information as possible in their replies.

The choice of models in qualitative exploration is typically purposeful (McLeod, 2011). The researcher knowing the participants personally might have made the study findings more predictable than the findings of a qualitative study that uses random sampling. Third, due to the inherent nature of humans, the researcher could be susceptible to individual prejudices. To avoid introducing personal biases to the study, I used bracketing, which required the identification of experiences, expectations, and existing knowledge that were related and relevant to the topic and problem of the study as recommended by Chan et al. (2013). In this manner, I was cautious of any personal biases in conducting data collection and analysis for the exploration.

Significance

This exploration can help in advancing the body of knowledge, data, and information on the influential role of social circles (e.g., teachers and principals/administrators) to the occurrence of bullying harassment in middle schools. Grounded on the central concept of the social learning theory, the relationship of an individual with society and immediate environment can influence the behavior and beliefs of an individual. Therefore, using this concept, I explored the experiences of the teachers and principals involved in school bullying and came up with effective programs on curbing school bullying. The knowledge generated in this research can help researchers comprehend the trends and dynamics arising from school bullying.

Consequently, the findings may have practical implications by aiding policymakers in generating policies on school bullying. The study created an in-depth analysis and conjectural model for prospective future studies as well. However, this research if implemented may accumulate information that could educate the community, government, educators, and the various establishments that address the risk of school bullying. Nevertheless, this exploration fills the gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on the measures that will effectively reduce the threat of school bullying. The research outcome, if properly executed, could sustain social change by reducing the rates of dropouts in schools, lessen the incidents of homicide and suicide resulting from school bullying, and decrease other anti-social behaviors associated with school bullying.

Social Change Implications

The exploration is relevant to promoting constructive social change, especially among today's students, and their needs, as the results may be valuable to the advancement of more effective deterrence programs to minimize cases of school bullying. The findings are also relevant to teachers, if some of the recommendations of the study if implemented, may influence policies and procedures that would have a practical impact on the utilization in schools. Finally, the study is relevant on a theoretical basis; it incorporated theories of bullying to design an optimal intervention method for curbing its growing presence in America.

Summary

The subject of bullying in school is severe and prevalent. However, a gap exists in the literature with regards to understanding the role the social groups surrounding the student play in managing school bullying, amplified by the circumstance that most of the existing bullying deterrence programs have not been experiential and methodically appraised (Chan et al., 2013). The specific issue is that the perceptions of individuals associated with students at a chosen middle school (e.g., teachers and principals/administrators), and their experiences of bullying, have not been fully explored empirically. In this study, one middle school was analyzed in detail to enhance the literature on this topic. Hence, the aim of this qualitative phenomenological investigation was to investigate the perceptions of individuals associated with students in a chosen middle school to understand the school personnel's experiences of bullying. A qualitative phenomenological design was implemented to accomplish the aim of the study and answer the research questions used. In line with the social learning theory,

data was collected from interviews with school representatives (e.g., teachers and principals/administrators). The study contributes to experiential data in school bullying and recommendations to help alleviate this persistent societal problem.

Chapter 2 comprises an appraisal of the relevant literature, the conceptual framework, a review of research literature and methodological literature, an analysis of the research design, unification of the research findings, and a review of earlier research. Chapter 3 contains the methodology of the study, including the research purpose, the research questions, the research design instrumentation, data collection, the operation of variables, the data analysis method, the limitations of the research design, internal and external validity, anticipated findings, and ethical matters. Chapter 4 includes data analysis and results. Finally, Chapter 5 contains conclusions and the outcomes of the study, including recommendations for practice, public policy, and future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the present study, I investigated the perceptions and experiences related to school bullying of teachers and principals/administrators at the selected middle school. In addition, I assessed the school's existing bullying deterrence programs to find out if the programs were adequate to curtail bullying or if more programs should be in place. I addressed a gap in the literature by addressing the subject of school bullying through the perspectives of people who are knowledgeable about the issue, namely, classroom teachers and school principals in the school environment where school bullying takes place.

As school bullying has made its way into the mainstream media and, by default, into the discussion forums of public policy makers across the globe (United Nations Publications, 2016), the literature available has been greatly expanded upon by researchers concerned with the causes and effects of bullying (Chan et al., 2013). Researchers studying bullying have generated an extensive library of empirical data and meta-analysis compilations from which to develop a baseline assessment (Chan et al., 2013). The understanding arising in this research of bullying's long-term implications has led to an increase in intervention programs (Cornell & Limber, 2015). However, despite measures beginning in 2005 with the Safe Schools Reporting Act, school bullying in the United States has increased (O'Malley & Lowery, 2014). According to O'Malley and Lowery (2014), there were 5,255 instances of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in the

2012-2013 school year (p. 4). Policymakers and school authorities need to take more action by coming up with tougher measures that will decree bullying to a minimal level.

The aim of this literature review is to scrutinize the literature on school bullying and the various antibullying programs available. This review offers a wide-ranging appraisal of the literature dealing with the conjectural and theoretical bases of school bullying and the various antibullying programs, the workability of these antibullying programs, and whether the present antibullying programs are achieving the desired outcomes. The chapter also includes an overview of the theoretical framework I used to guide the present study. I evaluated the available data as it relates to the investigation of school bullying and the bullying deterrence programs in the selected middle school. In the literature review, I define key terms and concepts. Other topics include bullying as a social concern, the role of the bystander, cyberbullying, present consequences, future implications, and middle school bullying. Last, I note gaps in the extant literature for additional investigation. The chapter begins with an overview of my literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the following databases and search engines to conduct the literature search: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full-Text database, Google Scholar, EBSCO using Education Research Complete and Google search engine. I used the following search terms: *school bullying and program*, *phenomenological study*, *Social learning theory, the role of the bystander*, *bullying legislation*, *bullying program*, *bullying prevention programs*, *social learning theory*, *cyber-bullying*, *phenomenological*, and an *anti-bullying*

program. Eighty-eight percent of the literature reviewed was published between 2013 and 2018; the remaining 12% were seminal works published before 2013. When the search words and phrases above-stated were used on the various database, I had over 3000 research works and articles, for the study. I used the most recent and relevant research work, mostly Ph.D. dissertations and articles. I stopped using the search engine in the various database at the completion of my work. The table below is the frequency count on how many times I searched the search terms and phrases listed below in the various database:

Table 1

Interactive Search and Frequency Counts

Interactive search,	Words/phrase	Frequency
ProQuest -Dissertation at Walden Theses full text database	School bullying and bystander, Bullying, Social learning Theory/Phenomenological study	150
Google Scholar	Bullying and Programs	10
Google Search	Social Learning Theory and bullying	5
EBSCO using Education	Bullying Social Learning Theory and Phenomenological Design	5

From my review of literature, although literature has been written on bullying, few researchers have addressed the persistence rise of bullying despite antibullying programs. In the literature review, I explore current problems confronting experts and

investigators in the field. Additionally, I examine the theoretical framework for the

present study and the methods used. Topics in the literature review include definitions of

bullying; the social concerns associated with the issue; the characteristics, present

consequences, and future implications of bullying with respect to the victims and the

attackers; and, finally, an assessment of the various approaches and intervention methods

that have been devised to address school bullying. In structuring the literature review, I

followed a systematic process wherein I evaluated the laws and programs on school

bullying, thereby exposing the research gap I addressed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the present exploration consisted primarily of

Bandura's (1989) social learning theory. Social learning theory postulates that violent

conduct is a creation of learned conduct and observation (Bandura, 1989). In short,

Bandura posited that children learn aggressive behavior through imitation and being

exposed to negative conducts through violent media content or peer influence (Bandura,

1989). A tenet of social learning theory is that children model behavior to which they

have been exposed, both positive and negative (Bandura, 1989). In this section, I discuss

the background and origins of the theory. In addition, I present the major theoretical

propositions and hypotheses, a brief analysis of empirical developments and applications

related to the present study, and a justification for the usage of this method in the present

study.

Experts widely accept that individuals learn through the observation of behavior

and the attitudes and outcomes associated with those behaviors (Martínez-Valderrey, &

Garaigordobil, 2015). Bandura (1989), who is renowned for conducting the "Bobo doll experiment," postulated that by observing others, one gets an impression of how new behaviors are acted out, and, later, this "coded" data serves as an instruction for behaviors (Bandura, 1989; McCleod, 2016). As such, a major argument of the social learning theory is that conduct is an incessant mutual collaboration between intellectual, behavioral, and ecological influences (Martínez-Valderrey & Garaigordobil, 2015; McCleod, 2011).

Specifically, Bandura subscribed to the concept of *reciprocal determinism*, or, the notion that environment and behavior interact in a mutually causal relationship (McCleod, 2011). Bandura broke from the early behaviorists who, believed behavior was shaped by the world (Martínez-Valderrey, & Garaigordobil, 2015; McCleod, 2011). Studying aggression in adolescents, Bandura rejected this one-sided view as being too simple and subsequently released his contention that behavior causes environment as well (Bandura, 1989; McCleod, 2011). However, Bandura (1989) ultimately revised his argument, considering behavior as an interface among three separate mechanisms: milieu, behavior, and an individual's psychosomatic progressions.

Along with behaviorism, social learning theory also has roots in Vygotsky's social development theory. The key points that are emphasized in Vygotsky's theory are that social interaction is important as knowledge is built with social interaction between two or more people (Schultz, 2012). Vygotsky's theory also argues that, through the development of the internal representation of action, or how one perceives their environment, self-regulation is developed, and that, through transmission of cultural tools such as symbols and language, human development occurs (Schultz, 2012). Researchers,

however, have referred to social learning theory, as a connection within behaviorism and classic cognitive learning concepts because it encompasses attention, retention, and inspiration, and because it emphasizes the importance of social learning (McCleod, 2011). In line with the current exploration, the components of the theory are appropriate for the explanation of the interaction between the bullying environment and the participants therein, as well as how interventions address or fail to address these interactions.

As mentioned previously, the necessary conditions for effective modeling, as outlined by social learning theory, include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1989). Specifically, Bandura (1989) argued the following descriptions of these conditions:

- Attention refers to the numerous issues, which rise or reduce the amount of care given, including uniqueness, emotional valence, pervasiveness, intricacy, purposeful value. One's sensual capacities, excitement level, perceptual set, previous support affect attention. Essentially, for a behavior to be imitated, it must first be noticed.

- Retention refers to the memory of what has been paid attention to, or how healthy behavior is stored in the memory. In other words, behavior imitation is contingent upon figurative coding, mental images, intellectual organization, emblematic preparation, and mechanical rehearsal.

- Reproduction refers to the propagation of conduct and the ability to do so. However, this includes the physical capability of reproducing a behavior and the self-observation of the reproduction of behavior.

- Motivation, in short, refers to having a good reason to imitate behavior or having the will to perform a particular action. Examples include past (i.e., social behaviorism), assured (imaginary motivations) and vicarious (seeing and recollecting the reinforced prototypical) behaviors (McCleod, 2016).

Recent research has developed social learning theory by exploring and investigating the various roles played by participants in any learning environment, as well as the contexts in which these environments are situated (Bradshaw, 2015). Social learning theory has been used to explore pedagogical strategies, organizational culture, education policy, and family systems, among others (Cornell & Limber, 2015; Widom & Wilson, 2015). Moreover, the changing nature of technology and the rapidity with which youth engage in it has moved researchers to the realm of cyber environments and how physical environments and individuals are influenced and interact with these ever-changing contexts (Tippett & Wolke, 2014).

Important to note too, however, is that many investigators have employed social learning model to the evaluation of intervention programs, such as bullying interventions and therapeutic programs for victims and perpetrators of bullying (Schacter & Juvonen, 2015). Similarly, to adequately organize and explain the findings of the present study, an in-depth phenomenology study, a framework that addresses the interaction between the environment, psychology, experiences, and behavior are necessary. Moreover, the data

obtained regarding teacher's perceptions of bullying, the remedial measures in place and the role of the family and online space in the bullying environment will add to the development of social learning theory due to the comprehensive nature of the exploration and the limited nature of the environment examined.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

In the literature appraisal, I reviewed the available literature dealing with the variations in the definition of bullying, the social concerns associated with the issue, the characteristics, direct consequences, and the future implications of bullying concerning the victims and the attackers. The roles the teachers and the principals played in the management of school bullying — finally, an assessment of the various approaches of intervention methods through the viewpoints of a collection of researchers. The literature review then follows a systematic narrowing process wherein the laws and programs were evaluated. The analysis was supported by specific data from the literature available and current anti-bullying programs, thereby exposing the research gaps the present study intends to address.

The defining characteristics of this phenomenon have continuously changed to include some actions under the traditional concept of bullying. In other words, as the understanding of the consequences of bullying has broadened, many of the activities that bring about these consequences have been recognized under an umbrella definition of bullying. Subsequently, the changes in the elements of this definition signify the evolving social understanding of bullying and the development of specific approaches to intervention methods. In the field of bullying research, definitional, conceptual, and

methodological issues have been persistently problematic, as have the theoretic

foundations of bullying conducts (Sercombe & Donnelly, 2013; Volk et al., 2012).

According to Mundbjerg et al. (2014) the occurrence of bullying is established when a

person is continually, and over the course of time, exposed to adverse action or actions of

another individual or group of individuals. Still, others have defined bullying as a

complex and harmful method of ill-treatment, predominant across societal locations and

around the world (Srabstein, 2013). Although this generalized definition leaves room for

interpretation, the extremities of these occurrences have developed into a social

phenomenon that has been viewed among students as early as elementary school and is

often considered to be carried out on into the workplace among adults.

Such a broad definition of bullying can often be considered subjectively without a

ground for punishment or reaction given the circumstances, and others have attempted to

apply a more structured definition to the concept. Cornell and Limber (2015), for

example, provided the following three characteristics as defining an occurrence of

bullying: "(1) intended aggressive conduct, (2) a power unevenness between attacker and

target, and (3) recurrence of the violent behavior" (p. 333). Regardless of the

characteristics of bullying, there is still room for some interpretation in determining the

purpose or intentions of a bully, as well as the perceptions of the victim. However,

according to Cornell and Limber (2015), the perception of the victim determines whether

the act is violating the rights and comfort of the victim, even if the intentions behind the

actions were not to create such an environment. However, bullying is not as much of a

new phenomenon as many media-related stories may suggest, but rather a long-running

condition in the development of social interaction skills and comprehension of the expectations of these interactions (Hymel & Swearer, 2015).

The definition of bullying has also broadened to include nuanced descriptions of essential antecedents of the phenomenon. In agreement with the distinction between bullying and aggression made by Hymel and Swearer (2015), Wong, Cheng, and Chen (2013) offered a more detailed definition of bullying to include the specific choosing of the target constructed on several motives that are connected to the ability or desire of the bully to dominate a target. Within this definition, it becomes possible to evaluate the reasons behind an individual's aggression rather than place all acts of aggression in the same category. Moreover, the imbalance of power is not only perceived but also becomes a reality, as the occurrences of bullying persist and eventually escalate (Schulz, 2012). In other words, the power imbalance that was initially imagined or portrayed in the bullying environment begins to be recognized throughout the environment by all parties involved. The bully becomes powerful, while the victim becomes powerless.

In this vein, there exists another important characteristic that should be addressed which is the distinction between a bully and the bullied. Specifically, as presented by Sharkey et al. (2015), there are variations between victimizations and being the victim of bullying. Most adolescents will, at some point or another be victimized in some manner that is consistent with the variables associated with bullying (Sharkey et al., 2015). Whether this includes being isolated from a group, pushed in the hallway, or some other isolated case of victimization, this is not the same level of victimization felt by the true

victims of bullying who experiences such incidents more frequently, but with significant indications of a power imbalance between them and the bully (Sharkey et al., 2015).

Rueger and Jenkins (2014) added that bullying could not be defined in one separate and comprehensive definition as there are three categories of bullying that have different contexts and consequences. Noting that physical bullying is associated with violent acts such as kicking and hitting. Rueger and Jenkins (2014) stated that verbal and relational bullying is much more common and overlooked in the school setting. These cases are also less frequently reported because the definitions of bullying do not often include these categories in a manner that is understood by the victims (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). In other words, the victims are not sure whether the acts against them would constitute a report of bullying or further make them an outcast, even in the eyes of the adults or educators that they speak to about the situation.

Although the occurrences of violence and aggression are noted in several definitions of bullying, researchers have also extended the definition of bullying to include perceived threats. Benčić (2014), for example, defined bullying as being a variety of different assaults that are not necessarily based on physical threats or aggression but often based on the perceived potential for this type of assault. Specifically, Benčić (2014) explained that bullying could be in the form of bodily, oral, or diverse types of emotive bullyings, such as deliberate barring from mutual events. The exclusion of an individual by another or a group of others could be considered bullying and create a sense of a hostile environment. In contrast, however, Kerzner (2013) defined bullying, not as a mere attack, or act of power, but rather as a more psychoanalytical concept that should be

addressed through a deep-rooted therapy program. Specifically, Kerzner (2013) stated

that bullying "is a way of relating to others through emotional and/or physical shaming

and domination" (p. 116). This shows that there are underlying conditions or

circumstances that lead to the bully understanding relationship to being based purely on

dominating and/or submissive roles.

Determining whether this is based on a mental process or an environmental

condition that needs to be addressed and should be the focus of all personnel who are

involved with the student. Prominent definitions of bullying have also expanded to

accommodate more concise categories of bullying types, as well as that of those who

participate or interact with the bully or victim in any way. For example, Swearer &

Hymel (2015) explained that the varying roles involved in an environment of bullying

should likewise be taken into contemplation. Specifically, Silva, Pereira, Mendonça,

Nunes, and de Oliveira (2013) listed the ensuing roles as being responsible parties and/or

reasonable contributors to the bullying environment: attackers/harassers, bullied,

provokers who are also victims, and unreceptive observers (p. 6821). While the victims

and the passive observers may not be blamed for the environment, it is important to

recognize that if any element or role was removed from the environment, then the

condition of bullying could not continue to be prevalent.

It is essential, however, when defining the social phenomenon of bullying, to only

address these occurrences as a direct issue between the bully and the victim, as the

process is much more complex than a traditional conflict (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

Further, a common misunderstanding about bullying is that it takes place surreptitiously,

and in a quantitative study of 79 children's reactions to bullying. Barratt, Ferris, and

Lenton (2015) found that emotional responses to bullying vary and that this too can

predict whether bystanders will act or remain passive observers of an occurrence of

bullying. Considering the meaning of bullying and victimhood, and the environment in

which bullying occurs, Swearer and Hymel's (2015) definition will ultimately become

relevant in determining the best options for intervention programs since the primary issue

is not found in the bully or the victim, but rather in the entirety of the complex social

group.

Bullying as a Social Concern

As previously mentioned, the presence of bullying did not begin with the media

coverage in 1999, but rather the more significant social concern regarding the issue was

largely formed at this time. This section of the literature review will illustrate that, as

research dealing with bullying continues to develop, the understanding of this issue has

been transformed into a social concern that must be rapidly addressed (Swearer and

Hymel, 2015). Through this recognition, some programs have been developed and

scrutinized through the lenses of having a long-term impact on society. Tracing the issue

through these lenses will offer a better view of the present approaches to intervention

programs. Notably, Adeoye (2013) addressed bullying, not as a new phenomenon as

portrayed by the media in response to extreme cases, but rather as an old social problem

that has become increasingly dangerous as it continues to defy all forms of programs and

intervention methods across multiple cultures and generations. The problem of bullying is

not new but continues to evolve and strengthen in the face of efforts to stop or curb the

phenomenon. While the extensions of this problem continue to grow with the availability of new technology and a larger population to alter the statistical figures. Adeoye (2013) debunked the claim that the present generation is responsible for the expansion of bullying as a social concern.

The negative connotations about the modern view of bullying as a social concern do not imply that it is not a viable concern. Adeoye (2013) observed that the problem of bullying is not only a concern but also an indicator of a society that is based on violence and power in a much more obvious manner than ever before. This prevents individuals, particularly students and young adults, from feeling safe enough in their environment to pursue their own interests and academic and financial success. The presence of the fear of harm continues to hinder the future advancements of the individuals and, by default, the entire society (Adeoye, 2013).

Important to note too is that consideration must be given to the level of tolerance in a society in which the study on bullying is being conducted (Wan Ismail, Nik Jaafar, Sidi, Midin, & Shah, 2014). This is partly because many cultures would see it as an activity in observance of tradition, whereas other cultures may view the same action as being aggressive, unnecessary, and unacceptable (Wan Ismail et al., 2014). Therefore, a universal definition of bullying should involve some elements of the cultural context and individual perception of the attacks. This contention is relevant in that the various definitions of bullying are discussed through an array of culturally diverse sources. This will be justification for a substantial portion of variation in the present study since it

applies to both the culture of the researchers, as well as the cultural setting of the participants.

Media and the Public Response

Although there is much concern, yet widely recognized, definitions for the concepts of bullying, the fear that occurrences of bullying be identified as a social issue worthy of rapid social policies came to light after two significant events in 1999. According to Cornell and Limber (2015), these events involved both the highly publicized case of the shooting at the Columbine High School, as well as the less publicized, but equally important Supreme Court ruling in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999) which stated that institutions might be held accountable for not stopping sexual harassment among the students. This set the scene for many schools to become proactive in the plight of the victims concerning school bullying and gave the public a sense of urgency in deterring such occurrences. Many believe that schools have a moral and lawful responsibility to offer a conducive learning atmosphere for the students in a community, regarding the physical building but the overall atmosphere of the school environment. Therefore, the proactive schools are initiating a system of adhering to these obligations and responsibilities as called upon by the community and legal system.

However, the passing of South Carolina's Safe School Climate Act of 2006, for example, suggests that some failures of measures aimed at creating safer schools are the direct result of non-implementation. Bradshaw (2014) added that the media coverage of the extreme cases of bullying ending in either extreme violence by the offender or victim or the decision of the victim to commit suicide or homicide had forced policymakers to

recognize the occurrences of bullying as being a significant public health concern. This has enhanced the requirements of school personnel to monitor students while they are present on the school property but leaves room for additional occurrences outside of the school and in the neighborhoods and cyberspace via the Internet and social media. Additionally, this shows the expansion of the phenomenon and further highlights the necessity for an all-inclusive understanding of these programs through a universal definition, which would allow for a sharing of information and a more improved, data-driven approach to interventions.

The effects of bullying, and how society is impacted, exemplifies the need for a universal definition and coordinative approaches. Migliaccio and Raskauskas (2013) examined a bullying program utilizing a recorded video model, in which eighty-one pupils participated. Students from the 4th to the 6th grade completed the tests, which assessed gains in knowledge of bullying and children's retorts to it. Results indicated that the penalties of being bullied are not only significant in the short term, that is, nearly immediately after the victimization begins, but also longitudinally as the victim is unable to reach full potential in academics, social settings, and mental stability (Miglaccio & Raskauskas, 2013). Further, Migliaccio and Raskauskas (2013) argued that the need for intervention is no longer assessed as being a concern of the school administration. The long-term costs of bullying occurrences will affect the financial and social well-being of the entire community. Though, this contention was also shared by Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Goldweber, and Johnson (2013) who found that the issue of bullying is not only a concern on the school property but also an issue into the entire community as a social

health concern. Bradshaw et al. (2013) found that some of the students, 5.4%, have reported the need to carry a weapon when going to school or interacting with their peers in a social setting. Bradshaw et al. (2013) proposed that this social problem should be investigated in the community and school setting before the presence of weapons on the children becomes such a social norm that the problem continues to expand.

Victims. As the literature, as well as the social definitions of bullying, will show, anyone is subject to becoming a victim of bullying. However, there are specific characteristics that have been studied about the susceptibility of an individual to fall prey to these actions. Again, the following is not a comprehensive list of features, but a guideline used when monitoring the school grounds for potential occurrences of bullying and to aid in the development of victim-oriented intervention programs. The typical victim of bullying is shy, quiet, often from an unsupportive family environment, and likely to exhibit signs of poor mental health or less desirable physical traits (Mundbjerg et al., 2014).

Further, in quantitative research investigating the attribution of human characteristics by bullies, data from 405 children showed that victims exhibited more anti-social behavior traits (Bradshaw, 2015; van der Werf, 2014). Although these traits and conditions are either temporary or subjective through the viewpoint of adults and those outside of the bullying environment, to those within the context, these conditions and traits are entirely relevant to the social conditions among the peer group (Mundbjerg et al., 2014). The bullying behaviors leave the victim feeling helpless in the environment

and often without hope for change in the future. Still, a lack of qualitative research on victim types in a specific context demands the need for the current research.

The demographic characteristics of victims. Considering the characteristics of the bully, it is essential to note prominent demographic and gender-related differences and the role they play in victim targeting. This becomes important when assessing a program for a group of students, as the program should be directed based on the types of assailants, as well as the most relevant forms of bullying in the group (Van Noordan et al., 2015). Silva et al. (2013) found that the boys were more likely to participate in bullying practices that included physical assault and verbal insults when in the presence of others. The girls, however, were more probably to exhibit bullying practices of exclusion and verbal assaults. These differences were found to be relatively stable among the various racial and socio-economic classes that were involved in the study, though the occurrences of an individual being the victim of bullying appeared to be higher in the lower socio-economic classes (Silva et al., 2013). In this vein, however, researchers have found that one of the primary correlates of victimization was a lower socioeconomic status than found within other members of their peer group (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). Further, feeling powerless, victims often decided to embrace their socio-economic status as part of their overall existence and, by default, believed that they deserve to be treated as a lower member of the school environment and society (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). This correlation is essential to consider, but a further description of the nuances of socio-economic status and other demographic variables as they relate to victimization are needed.

Apart from gender and socio-economic characteristics, attributes by which bullies target victims also include the status of the sexual activity. In a study conducted by LeVasseur, Kelvin, and Grosskopf (2013), sexually active minority adolescents were found to be at a much higher risk for being the victim of bullying than were their non-sexually active counterparts. Additionally, homosexual adolescents, particularly those who are of an ethnic minority, were placed at the highest risks (Levasseur et al., 2013). While these are not characteristics that can be altered or considered to be addressed, as would depression or psychological risk factors, this information is valuable as educators, and school administrators should be aware of all the risk factors when discussing the appropriate way to address the bullying environment. When the personals are aware of this risk factor, a safer learning environment can be arranged for these students (LeVasseur et al., 2013; Van der Werf, 2014). LeVasseur et al (2013) noted that homosexual students report feeling unsafe at school and avoid attendance as "a national sample of students found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students were 3 times more likely to feel unsafe at school than heterosexual peers, and 90% of LGBT students reported having been verbally or physically harassed" (p. 1083). Therefore, although this is not a characteristic of all victims of bullying, there is a large enough sample to provide evidence that this characteristic must be taken into cognizance when creating an intervention program.

It is vital to note both the relative lack of qualitative work dealing with specific characteristics related to victim characteristics. While this is partly because individual characteristics of both victims and bullies are mostly unique to the individual and

problematic to the measure, there is also a need for research dealing with the contextual environments of both victims and bullies to observe interactions between variables as mentioned earlier. As such, the next section will discuss the available research dealing with bully characteristics.

Bully Characteristics

As is the case with the features of the victims of bullying, the same is true of the characteristics of the attackers—there is no comprehensive list of physiognomies that can be attributed to every bully or every circumstance, nor does the presence of these features guarantee that such actions will take place. Researchers have contended that when discussing the typical characteristics of bullies, it is vital to separate the terms of aggression and that of bullying, as the two are not the same. However, there are similar and often overlapping characteristics found in each definition; specifically, bullying is aggressive, whereas not all aggression is considered to be bullying (Reijntjes et al., 2013). More often, an exhibition of aggression is found to be a single reaction to a circumstance, while bullying is destructive conduct that is repetitive as a symbol of authority over the bullied (Dixon, Singleton & Straits, 2015; Wong et al., 2013). Similarly, Swearer and Hymel (2015) found a collection of callous-unemotional traits of bullies, including disruptive character traits, anxiety, depression, vulnerability to a peer group, and, in some cases, a superior intellectual level.

Moreover, several families and peer relationships and influences have been found to lead to individuals potentially becoming a perpetrator of bullying. Inadequate supervision, adverse environments, and even parental involvement in gangs or other

negative organizations can often be viewed as being predictive of an individual's status as

a bully (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). The environment is either supportive of these activities

or fails to foster the attention and inclusion that the developing adolescent later seeks

through asserting dominance over others in their peer group.

Research on the psychology of bullies is crucial to improved approaches to

interventions. As such, researchers have noted the primary characteristics of bullies. One

of these is that of the inability to distinguish between acceptable and mutual relationships

and those that are founded in the concepts of power dynamics (Kerzner, 2013). This is

often based on the underdeveloped attachment that results in the individual's inability to

conceptualize an appropriate relationship. This inability is believed to be connected to the

maternal relationship, research has suggested that a secure attachment ability should be

formed in infancy or early childhood with either the mother or the primary caregiver and

that if this process fails, an individual is likely to develop a fragile ego and seek such

attachment through asserting dominance over others.

Further, maternal depression, as well as low maternal warmth, has been shown to

correlate with bullying characteristics and being diagnosed with ADHD or a similar

condition related to hyperactivity appeared to be the case in most reported bullies (Wan

Ismail et al., 2014). This is not to suggest that all students who have been diagnosed with

a hyperactive disorder are certain to be bullies, but it does offer another view of

predictive behaviors. Still, it is imperative to identify the importance of these variables as

they relate to the success or failure of intervening programs, as well as for researchers to

consider when conducting studies in various school settings or contexts. It has been

shown that cultural context is vital in determining relationships between variables, and an absence of qualitative exploration on the characteristics of bullies in specific contexts demands a more in-depth look at these variables as they interact and are influenced by interventions.

Bully/Victims

Although the bully and the victim are often recognized separately through specifically-related characteristics, the emergence of another identified participant in this environment has led to the study of the bully/victim as one typology. These individuals are characterized as being more of a concern as they represent both extremes of the bully and the victim as they function according to both roles. The study of this group has led to an in-depth comprehension of the processes that take place in the social context of the bullying environment as each variable is recognized through the individual bully/victim. The epidemic of bullying has risen so as there are no longer bullies and victims as a separate entity, but approximately 5% of students fall into both categories (Dickerson Mayes et al., 2014). These bully/victims are described as victimized in the most extreme ways, whereas their only course of retaliation, in the fragility of the adolescent mind, is to, in turn, become bullies themselves.

Conceptual Challenges

One problematic issue identified by research conducted on bullies and victims, however, has been the apparent lack of understanding of any clear distinction between bully/victim typology and characteristics, which set bullies and victims apart as separate typologies altogether. Notably, although the study conducted by Dickerson Mayes et al.

(2014) suggested more suicidal ideation in the bully/victim category, the study also suggested several similar characteristics across the groups in the bullying environment, and neurological conditions, despair, and nervousness were found in those engage in bullying and those on the receiving end. Research has shown physiological data have been correlated to environmental links to bullying, such as personality traits and social behavior, although many of these correlations have lacked any substantive theoretical explanation (Book, Volk & Hosker, 2012; Crothers et al., 2013; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Marini & Volk, 2016). These limitations are notable in that to implement intervention programs in an effective manner, in any environment, an understanding of the target population is necessary.

Although the bully/victim is a relatively new categorization and has a little distinction in classic theory, researchers have worked to distinguish the essential characteristics from other typologies associated with the bully environment. For example, much like Dickerson Mayes et al. (2014), Ragatz, Anderson, Fremouw, and Schwart (2011) also distinguished between the bullying and the target of the buying. However, the Ragatz et al. (2011) developed a much more comprehensive view of the bully/victim in that the assaults are often more elaborate and violent than those of the bully as anticipated by the discussion of Wong et al. (2013). Just as the attacks are more severe, the consequences of these actions and the psychological impacts are also considerably more significant.

The bully/victim is found to be more aggressive, have more difficulty in regulating emotions, and exhibit less self-control than the bully. Ragatz et al. (2011)

explained that in contrast to the bully, the bully/victim is much more emotional and displays a higher frequency of temper-related assaults. When comparing bully/victims to their victim counterparts, Ragatz et al. (2011) found that there are also significantly more differences than similarities as the bully/victims assert a better way of retaliation, despair, and isolation than do individuals who have never engaged in an episode of bullying.

Bully/victims are also more susceptible to deviant behaviors than their counterparts are. Through several quantitative studies, Yang and Salmivalli (2013) concluded bully/bullied had the biggest risk for later maladjustment and participation in aggression, alcohol use, and developing mental health disorders. Moreover, these tendencies tend to be exacerbated the more isolated a bully/victim becomes (Sangalang, Tran, Ayers, & Marsiglia, 2016). In the contemporary bullying environment, however, isolation can come in many forms, as can methods of bullying. Yang and Salmivalli (2013) claimed that bully/bullied are likely to assert their dominance in the form of cyberbullying and other digital forms of bullying to avoid face-to-face confrontations in which the bully/victim could be intimidated. These methods offer a free form of bullying and allow the assertion of aggression through the mask of anonymity and the protection of digital space. Eventually, the bully/victim is likely to escalate from this form of bullying into a more physically aggressive confrontational style as their confidence in asserting power is further reinforced through digital communication. Twemlow and Sacco (2013) also warned that the victimization of the bully/victim does not cease as the tendency to bully others increases, but rather the victimization serves as a fuel for the

latter, and that bully/bullied should be considered top priority for programs involving prevention, detection, and intervention of bullying.

The Bystander

Several recent studies have looked deeper into the social function of bullying. Subsequently, it has been recognized that the previously assumed "innocent" bystander plays a much more relevant role in maintaining a bullying-free environment (Twemlow & Sacco, 2013). A substantial literature has since emerged in the wake of the recognition of the bystander's role in the bullying environment. As such, policymakers and practitioners should consider the function of the bystander when considering intervention efforts.

Passive or overt complicity by bystanders can influence and encourage the bullying environment. In short, the social atmosphere of bullying is further intensified by the presence of bystanders who either encourage the bullying through actively acknowledging the actions or continue to allow such events to maintain the status quo by looking the other way during the bullying (Twemlow & Sacco, 2013). While it is apparent that the bullies do not act as aggressively in front of authority figures out of the fear that they may become powerless in the environment, Schultz (2012) noted that the bully requires some form of an audience from which he or she can pull their power. Schultz (2012) claimed that through this need, the bullies give the bystanders a very active role in the victimization of the recipient of the attack. Without the bystanders, the bully would have no power to exhibit. Bystanders continue to allow the bully to use them out of fear of becoming the next victim through retaliation. The concept of the audience being in charge does not enter the cognitive mind of the young students as the fear and

social environment prevent such thought process (Shultz, 2012). Therefore, Schultz (2012) claimed that programs and intervention methods must also hold the bystanders accountable for their role in the bullying environment either through direct punishments or through social recognition of being involved with a negative connotation to such recognition.

In this vein, a lack of intervention on the part of bystander has also been blamed for the perpetuation of bullying environments. Bystanders serve as a bully to the victim as they marginalize the individual and continue to allow the victim to feel as if they are entirely and eternally isolated from the crowd (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigottn, 2012). While bystanders may perceive themselves to be innocent in the entire bullying process, by continuing to promote this isolation, they become a part of the bullying problem as being a bully/bystander. The function of the passerby is the primary condition of the bullying environment (Polanin et al., 2012). By not offering care to the victim, the bystander is offering backing and encouragement to the bully (Polanin et al., 2012). Nevertheless, this prevents any outside measures from hindering the actions of the bully as the unspoken commitment of the bystander justifies and reinforces these actions in the perception of the bully. These bystanders often continue to offer such encouragement out of fear of retribution and becoming a victim of bullying themselves, but the fact remains that the entire cycle would end if there were no audience or bystanders to participate (Barhight et al., 2013; Polanin et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying

Although cyberbullying is less frequently exhibited on school property, it generally serves as an extension of the school environment through a continued elevation of the power imbalance. Adolescents are found to be spending much more of their free time on digital devices such as cell phones and social media websites: this offers them additional communication between their peers and allows for the bullying to go outside the school grounds and to the outside environment. While these activities are not the direct responsibility of the school personnel, these occurrences should be addressed as a segment of the school's bullying detection, deterrence, and intervention programs.

Cyberbullying has been a growing concern of both researchers and policymakers, as technology has become a more prevalent factor in human interaction. Cyberbullying has also been defined as an imbalance of power presented using technology. With these defining characteristics of cyberbullying in mind, one can see that the only difference between traditional bullying and the modern version of cyberbullying is found in the location or environment of the presentation of the power imbalance. Davison and Stein (2014) explained that cyberbullying could be viewed as more dangerous to the youth as there is an expanded environment where the assaults can take place, and there are less control and monitoring than in the physical environment.

Occurrences of cyberbullying tend to be higher in more advanced grade levels as the availability of the technology is generally more attainable, and the level of parental and school authority monitoring tends to decrease as the students' progress through the school system. As the trend is for technological devices to be in the hands of younger

people, researchers have warned that parents and educators must be proactive in continuing to monitor the use of such devices, as the consequences of cyberbullying are the same as the consequences discussed in the previous sections in regard to school environment bullying (Rice et al., 2015; Selkie, Rajitha, Ya-Fen & Moreno, 2015).

Further, Davison and Stein (2014) acknowledged the potential for young students to be involved in bullying using social media but also added that the parents and educators are often unaware of the seriousness of these issues and frequently neglect to discuss these occurrences with the students. With the growing emphasis on bullying in the media and social context, parents are regularly discussing how a student can recognize a bullying situation in the physical environment (Davison & Stein, 2014). Additionally, parents tend to assume that the school personnel

are equipped to handle any occurrences of bullying in the real school atmosphere. However, there is much less monitoring that occurs in the cyber environment and that this leaves the students on their own to determine the safety of a given situation (Davison & Stein, 2014; Selkie et al., 2015).

Empathy

Another notable area of concern is the diminishing characteristic of empathy in the upcoming generation. Cyberbullying can be viewed as more dangerous than the traditional bullying occurrences in a physical environment. Not only can the damage happen more rapidly and extend to a significantly larger audience of bystanders, but also the fact that the bully can inflict such damage without actually looking into the face of the victim, and with the ease of clicking a button, removes the sense of empathy for the

victim. The lack of empathy for the victim also limits the empathy of bystanders as well (Davison & Stein, 2014; Martínez-Valderrey & Garaigordobil, 2015).

While the physical harm is removed from the occurrences of cyberbullying, the mental damage and psychological injury are consistent, if not more severe, than that of the victims of all other forms of bullying. Davison and Stein (2014) recommended an increased focus on empathy in any programs that are utilized for diminishing bullying. Additionally, face-to-face communication should be used whenever possible, along with a discussion that there are individuals on the other side of the computer screen. Davison and Stein (2014) claimed that this recognition would help to diminish the occurrences of cyberbullying among the young generation. Still, more research needs to be done dealing with how cyberbullying hinders established interventions, and whether more interventions that are contemporary consider this prevalent form of bullying in implementation and evaluation.

Present Consequences

Although bullying can be looked at through the lenses of the victim specifically, several large-scale consequences must be considered in both the personal and social contexts. These consequences present themselves in medical, psychological, and social arenas wherein the issue becomes more of a community problem as opposed to being only a school-based concern. The literature available about these consequences ranges widely in topics, as do the potential areas of implications.

The psychological trauma of being bullied has been linked to a few disorders and violent tendencies that range from self-harm to attacks on school property. However, as

much as we keep silent over bullying, the victim often suffers this trauma without seeking help until the results are manifested into a life-changing, or life-ending, circumstance (Silva et al., 2013). Victims often exhibit early signs of this trauma and these signs most often manifest in poor academic achievement standards (Henry et al., 2014). Moreover, this is the first indicator of a lessened comprehension of the meaning of life, and the meaning of life has been directly linked to a person's perception of comfort and personal purpose (Henry et al., 2014). As this is diminished through occurrences of bullying, the individual is likely to either seek purpose by lashing out in a drastic display of retaliation and violence or silently slip into a state in which suicidal tendencies begin to take over the typical adolescent mental processes.

As such, teenagers who are bullied are reportedly more probable to' take their life, due to the overwhelming psychological distress that is involved in the attacks and pursuit of acceptance (LeVasseur et al., 2013). Further, sexually active teenagers were more susceptible to both being a target of bullying and attempting suicide (LeVasseur et al., 2013). These findings were accurate in both separate and collective studies that placed the sexually active teenager at an even higher risk for suicide attempts.

Psychological Consequences

As the risk factor for suicide and violent tendencies is found embedded in the occurrences of bullying, studies have been conducted to explore how powerlessness and submissiveness may create helplessness, low self-opinion, and absence of motivation (Henry et al., 2012). As the psychological effects of bullying have been at the forefront of the media coverage and concern about the community health boards, there are also

concerns about the physical health beyond that of the actual visual conditions that result

from physical aggression (Gini, Pozzoli, Lenzi & Vieno, 2014). Specifically, there has

been a substantial rise in the reports of headaches amongst school-aged kids who either

witness or are a victim of a bullying situation, and it has been found that bullied students

are more likely than non-bullied students to reflect a variety of adverse physical signs

(Gini et al., 2014). It is the general understanding that many of these reports may come as

an attempt to avoid attending learning institution and face the situations of bullying on

the school property. A meta-analysis of several studies that monitored these reports show

that these are true and there are significant variations between the physical well-being of

the victim and those students who do not suffer from this social phenomenon (Gini et al.,

2014).

Behavioral Consequences

As previously mentioned, bullies, victims, and bully/victims have more tendency

toward acting out: this is often due to the inability of the adolescent to accurately control

their situation as this is the primary purpose behind their actions. As the situations

escalate, many consequences must be faced by the attacker that could either involve

accepting that others, or the victim coming out from under the control of these attacks,

only base their popularity on fear rather than true acceptance.

Additionally, as the victim becomes more threatened, the bully is more likely to

be at risk for being the victim of an attack or homicide at the hands of their victim

(Srabstein, 2013). Depression and anxiety are highly present among the victims of

bullying and that these consequences can be viewed through both the interim and lasting

implications of bullying (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). Several studies have reported a connection between little self-confidence and low academic accomplishment and showed that the combination of bullying and the acknowledged psychological disorders contribute to this documented scenario (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). Furthermore, Rueger and Jenkins (2014) asserted that peer victimization could be highly associated with lowered school attendance and further results in a lower level of academic achievement for the victims of bullying.

Differences Among Demographics

*C*onsequences of bullying have also been shown to differ among racially/ethnically diverse students. Racial/ethnic characteristics of victims are compounded with other areas of discrimination, which intensify the presence of health risks such as psychological disorders and depression-related concerns including poor health habits, and lowered self-image (Pan & Spittal, 2013). Additionally, physical assaults and self-injurious behaviors are more common among victims of racial and religious-related bullying, and unhealthy behaviors also appear to be higher among these victims as there were a higher number of reported victims who smoked and used other substances as coping mechanisms (Pan & Spittal, 2013). Interestingly, however, resulting self-blame occurs more frequently in schools with fewer occurrences of bullying than in schools where bullying is part of the normal school activities (Schacter & Juvonen, 2015).

Schacter and Juvonen (2015) suggested that this is because the victims do not have as many peers in this subgroup to relate to regarding the experience of being a

victim and therefore blame themselves for being singled out in the school environment. Although these findings do not correlate with most of the literature that suggests that minimalizing bullying will diminish the negative consequences, the study does offer an extended view into the victims as they relate to one another as a coping mechanism. Schacter and Juvonen (2015) added that further research into the consequences of minimal bullying as opposed to zero occurrences or regular occurrences should be made to evaluate an appropriate method of counteracting the increased self-blame that was exhibited in this study.

Concerning targeted interventions, however, the academic achievements of the victims of bullying should be the primary focus of the intervention and detection programs as this is not only an indicator of targets but also an indicator of the occurrences of bullying. Specifically, van de Werf (2014) noted that a sudden change in the academic performance of a student should automatically alert the school personnel to investigate a possible situation of bullying and to speak to the student in a manner that will foster open communication. Frequent tests should be utilized, as well as regular reports from the individual educators, to assess the academic performance of the students and allow for a process of early intervention methods to be implemented prior to any escalation of the situation. Further, the consequences, although they may vary based on several demographic and social variances, are often most regular among all cultures when considering the immediate consequence of lowered self-esteem for the victims of bullying (Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Ortega-Ruiz, & Monks, 2015). Nevertheless, this alleviates these differences as a risk factor for dealing with this consequence and promotes the

programs in all scenarios to include an emphasis on self-esteem. As self-perception often directly affects all areas of achievement and motivation, it is important to understand this as being the primary, universal consequence among all cultures and status groups when the individual is a victim of bullying.

Future consequences. The future implications for the victims of bullying go far and beyond the present emotional state at the time of the occurrences. The average GPA for ninth grade students who were bullied during their early educational experience was significantly lower than other members of their graduating class (Mundjberg et al., 2014). A lower GPA upon entering high school would likely influence a student's ability to enter college or pursue a higher educational level, which would indicate a long-term inability to gain financial success. In this vein, McDougall et al. (2013) established the long-term effects of consequences through neuroscience as studies have shown that an individual can relive traumatic events through their mental processes. Accordingly, a victim of bullying will continue to experience the bullying events in their mind throughout their lifetime, and this will prevent the victim from healing or move beyond the earlier discussed current consequences (Vaillencourt et al., 2013). The continued stress in adolescence will physically hinder the bullied person's capability to cope with stressful events in the future. Further, Vaillancourt et al. (2013) found that victimization could influence DNA methylation and result in alterations of the DNA sequence. Through these evaluations, Vaillancourt et al. (2013) linked scientifically based biological changes that occur due to victimization that hinder the individual throughout a lifetime.

Important to note too is the effects of bullying which has taken place early in life, and the presence of a bullying environment in the early years of childhood is predictive of some adverse outcomes as the child grows into adulthood. Specifically, Reijntjes et al. (2013) noted that the individual who is found to bully in childhood is more likely to live a lifestyle of criminal activity and have a more negative reaction towards authority in adulthood. A perceived gain of popularity and power is further advanced through the fear of others in the young peer group, but the same is not exhibited in adult peers. The results are generally a heightened tendency to exhibit aggressive and socially unacceptable behaviors (Reijntjes, 2013). Moreover, Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, and Arseneault (2010) found a substantial data available to suggest that the effects of bullying on the psychological and behavioral spectrum do not necessarily end when the occurrences of bullying cease or the individual grows into adulthood. These concerns are often elevated as the individual comes out of the bullying environment. The needed resilience to overcome such dramatic conditions must be fostered in a manner that creates positive reactions to prevent the continuation of the negative consequences on into their adult relationships and psychological developmental periods in life.

Self-perception of being a victim continues to develop and that these victims of early bullying continue to be among the victims in later stages of life, particularly in college. Students are unable to make the shift from early victimization to be a peer among others in this environment and frequently fall victim to similar situations as their age (Adams & Lawrence, 2011). The inability of these individuals to alter their self-perception continues to result in lowered achievement levels in all areas of life, and

bullied individuals are likely not to feel secure and welcome in the school environment (Adams & Lawrence, 2011), which continues to hinder their ability to succeed and adjust in adulthood. Boulton (2013) further examined the long-term implications of childhood bullying through a study of adult participants who report having been bullied when they were children.

According to Boulton (2013), most of the participants reported having severe anxiety in adulthood, feelings of exclusion even without the presence of a catalyst for these feelings. Ultimately, this is associated with low self-esteem because of childhood bullying. In other words, the retrospective feelings are repeated in the daily routines of the adults. Boulton (2013) noted that the primary long-term effect that was reported was social anxiety.

Notably, there are assumptions and limitations that naturally apply to a study that utilizes self-reporting and the memory accounts of the participants; this is the most externally valid literature available. Still, this highlights the need for a more in-depth study into the bullying environment as it exists in the context of bullying interventions so that future researchers can add depth and weight to mediating variables being measured over time and reliably gauge the efficacy of bullying interventions.

Remedial approaches to bullying. It is noteworthy to take cognizance of the fact that bullying is not just a rite of passage as many adults may tend to pass the condition off as being, but rather involves a real violation of another individual's civil rights. Therefore, as bullying is being used interchangeably with harassment, Cornell and Limber (2015) posited that it is the duty of the school, just as it would be the workplace,

to foster an environment that is free from harassment or bullying. When discussing the approaches for the intervention of a bullying environment, one must address both the victims and this environment has influenced the aggressors as well. Cornell and Limber (2015) explained that it had been determined by the Supreme Court that the schools are responsible for fostering an environment that is not hostile to promote a safe learning environment for the students who attend their facility. Bradshaw (2014) insisted that one must not diminish the power of the family and the caregivers concerning stabilizing this environment. In other words, acceptable behavior and the ability to confront and withstand adverse actions begin with a positive setting and foundation of communication at home. Still, researchers must focus their efforts on informing public policy that will improve responses by public educators and program and intervention planners.

School climate. Several areas of the school climate need further study before formulating an appropriate and effective program that will alleviate the aggression and tendency to bully among school-aged children. Specifically, Espelage, Low, and Jimerson (2014) drew on the principle that the school climate is responsible for the actions of the students and that this climate is temporal. The regular changes will require regular and corresponding changes to the overall approaches to the bullying programs. In this context, Espelage et al. (2014) do not advocate for any one program, but rather call for a constant change in approach based on the needs of the school environment. It is vital to view the following approaches through the lenses of school climates and how each could be amended to evolve with the students and the need of the learning institution.

The school climate is a multi-dimensional concept that can be difficult to unpack and, therefore, difficult to measure. One part of the school environment that has been assessed by Ziv and Dolev (2013) is that of background noises in the overall school environment. The authors claimed that the collection of sounds could stimulate aggression and further contribute to a lower standard of educational achievements within the school environment. However, Ziv and Dolev (2013) noted that numerous studies have indicated that a positive change in the climate can be made through the use of background music that soothes the tendencies for violence and encourages a more positive school environment. The studies showed that music tends to calm the students and alleviate symptoms of distress and anxiety. Ziv and Dolev (2013) suggested that a variety of music be explored to find the best possible climate for the demographics of the school environment.

Further, Green (2007) assessed the need for appropriate responses to bullying in the form of aggressive programs that address all parties involved in the bullying environment. Green (2007) noted that everyone, including the bullies, would benefit from diminishing this social concern. With such a wide range of benefits, Green (2007) questioned why more schools are not willingly adjusting the curriculum to include bullying interventions without the need for federal mandates and outside requirements. Green (2007) further asserted that these programs should begin in early education courses from the Kindergarten to the 8th grade to prevent an escalation of these occurrences later in the educational environment. However, as mentioned previously, the school climate is

a nebulous concept, and additional study is essential to target the specific environmental interventions, which contribute positively to the school environment.

Solutions. Many solutions at multiple levels have been aimed at affecting the school climate. Edmondson and Zeman (2011) stated that the mandate for safe schools has progressed beyond the control of the independent school administrators and school districts as the federal government has determined that its presence in this mandate is not only justified but also necessary for the safety of the students. Schools have previously been encouraged to offer a safe school by the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Community Act (SDFSC, Title IV, Part A), which included an option for students to transfer from an unsafe school if the school was consistently noted for being unsafe and there were other educational options available (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011).

As the schools receive funding based on enrollment, the funding would also be closely tied to the success of the anti-bullying programs that were implemented on the campuses. However, this did not appear to be enough incentive for several schools and the federal government added the changes in 2004 to the Persons with Incapacities Act. These changes allowed for equal punishment, so long as the actions were not directly linked to the disability and prevented several bullies from going without punishment based on a disability. To date, the federal government is continuing to press school safety laws to be present on every campus and accurately and consistently enforced to provide for the safe learning environment for all the students (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). Further, programs aimed at bullying prevention should involve programs for all the potential roles (See SrabStein et al., 2013; Silva et al., 2013). However, this would not

only aid victims but also help to bring awareness to the difficulties in social settings that lead the bullies into this state of aggression, as well as offer tools and resources for the bystanders or witnesses to these events.

Interventions. Bullying intervention programs should also address the adult stakeholders, as they need better forms of detection and prevention. Such programs are not only intended for the training of school personnel but also intended to assist parents and other parties who are in contact with the adolescents of the community. Additionally, further training should be provided for health care professionals who may encounter the students as a resource for detecting such occurrences in both the victim and the attacker to deter and prevent such actions (Srabstein, 2013). Recognizing that there are biological factors involved, rather than addressing only the social and psychological factors, will allow the medical profession to become more involved in community-based interventions. However, this means that there are a few avenues that must be addressed beyond explaining that bullying is erroneous and that it must be eradicated. Swearer and Hymel (2015) called for a holistic approach to intervention by expressing the biological aspects of bullying. Nevertheless, this, according to the authors, does not downplay the need for behavior modification, but instead offers a more physical place to begin the process of intervention. Benčić (2014) suggested that there should be a regular presence of abusive behavior recognition and victim protection mechanisms and that these should be implemented in all areas of society rather than specifically on school grounds. Although school property may be the primary scene of the bullying, the entire community should be involved in all programs to end these occurrences. However, as adults, society

has authority figures to help and protection when there is the threat or occurrence of either violence or harassment, and the subject of bullying is a social concern that should be handled through the social compliance of the entire community (Benčić, 2014).

Similarly, there are noteworthy effects for both the bullied and the attacker in relation to the bullying environment that must be rapidly addressed to promote a more empathetic and capable future generation. This phenomenon seems to take over the entirety of the adolescent experience (Bradshaw, 2015). Although media attention is generally biased against the attacker and readily addresses the plight of the victim, the social phenomenon must be addressed through the adult lenses of both the bullied and the bully, as it is in the overall interest of the public to fully evaluate, understand and mediate these occurrences holistically (Bradshaw, 2015; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). While it is not the intention of the public to place the blame on any individual child for the entire generation that has been negatively impacted by bullying, it is often the tendency in individualized cases. Bradshaw (2015) explained that it is imperative to look beyond the blame and go directly toward the underlying catalysts by utilizing the research appropriately. Although several programs have been developed about the prevention of bullying, Bradshaw (2015) claimed that they been rigorously studied for their effectiveness. These programs, if they do provide some form of scientific evidence based on a study, generally are individualized in their methods of measurements and cannot be asserted as being valid in the sense of reliability and the ability to repeat the study.

The available literature dealing with interventions are often biased in the sense of the social need to claim intervention, while the evidence of the increased occurrences

should serve as ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of the current programs (Bradshaw, 2015). The elements of effective bullying interventions include classroom management skills, appropriate levels of supervision, and extensive training for the educators and classroom assistants (Bradshaw, 2015). Additionally, the more successful programs did not specifically address the bullies or the victims but rather focused on the roles of the bystanders and witnesses by explaining that, without an audience, these occurrences would not exist or, at the very least, would be significantly diminished. However, this suggests that, by understanding the literature and evidence about the occurrences of bullying, authorities and administrators should recognize the function of attention and address this directly to format an anti-bullying intervention program.

Packman, Lepkowski, Overton, and Smaby (2005) noted that the previous attempts to stop bullying had been aimed at the older students and the roles that the adult stakeholders should play in the detection and prevention of bullying. Zero tolerance policies emphasize these roles as the adults are viewed as the authoritative figures in the school environment. However, Packman et al. (2005) stated that there is a movement to involve the students in such programs as being active participants and responsible players about developing a safe school environment. By giving the students the feeling of ownership in the school environment, Packman et al. (2005) claimed that there is a shift in the perspectives of the educators from being authoritative to be a peer in the efforts to end bullying.

Researchers have agreed that bullying is not merely a school environment concern, that everyone in the community should be involved in monitoring and prevent

its occurrence. It has been asserted that the primary location of such events is on school property and that the utmost method to address the situation is to be available in this environment with active and assertive intervention programs. Migliaccio and Raskauskas (2013) contend that the school environment is a community, and therefore, by addressing the school, the intervention messages would become a community or social value within the school environment. While it is not clear, based on the available research, which role is the specific catalyst of bullying, Bradshaw (2015) indicated the bystander as being the primary reason for the ability for bullying to continue. Therefore, the holistic approach of intervention at the school level would initiate a change in the attitudes of the members of this community and prevent the encouragement of bullying by removing the presence of the bystanders (Miglaccio & Raskauskas, 2013). However, Migliaccio and Raskauskas (2013) also noted that the holistic approach would help to stop the occurrences of bullying once they have already influenced the school environment but asserted that prevention measures should be taken on a much smaller scale and much younger age.

By addressing the students on a smaller scale, the mediators can implement several role-playing activities, address specific scenarios, and actively address feedback and questions from the participants. Migliaccio and Raskauskas (2013) noted that, in the study of these smaller-scaled prevention methods, the schools showed an average reduction of 17% in occurrences of bullying in comparison to the control environments and baseline figures. The programs included discussions, as well as video presentations, with several of the programs offering only the videos to understand the importance of the active discussions. The programs that only involved watching videos did not show a

decrease in occurrences but did show an expansion of the comprehension of bullying among the participants (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2013). In this vein, Nese, Horner, Dickey, Stiller, and Tomlanovich (2014) discussed the potential effectiveness of a holistic approach to an intervention known as "Expect Respect" and involved both whole school seminars and small student focus groups. The study reported on a few variables including both the student perception of the environment, as well as observed occurrences of bullying behaviors such as physical or verbal abuse in the cafeteria of the participating schools. The program encouraged students to learn appropriate behaviors, acceptable responses, and social interaction skills. Although the program, nor the frequency of observed behavior, altered the opinions of the students, Nese et al. (2014) reported that the frequency of the training limited the study and therefore altered the potential positive results. Other interventions, however, have targeted positive reinforcement.

Domino (2013) argued that one of the primary effective qualities of a bully intervention program is teaching appropriate social skills rather than attacking the negative options. In other words, positive reinforcement overrides punishments or negative reinforcements. Several established programs address this quality with videos, individual assignments, and group role-playing activities. By looking at the best way to handle a given situation, Domino (2013) claimed that the students are better prepared when the circumstances come up throughout their daily routines. These programs are easily integrated into the daily learning activities and are often preferred by the educators, as they become part of the learning day rather than a distraction to the lesson plans (Domino, 2013). One problematic element of these approaches, however, as pointed out

by Bell, Raczynski, and Horne (2010), is that many of the holistic approaches to bullying prevention remove one of the most critical stakeholders in the safety of the educational environment and some of the most influential adults in the development of young adolescents: teachers. Specifically, Bell et al. (2010) noted that effective prevention should be designed to impact teacher efficacy positively. However, this has recently been a great concern as the media covers the rare instance where a teacher takes advantage of the authority given to them in the school environment. Overall, teachers and school administrators are often either forbidden or frightened to intervene in a case of obvious or potential bullying activities.

The Role of Teachers in Preventing Bullying

Tutors play a significant function in averting bullying in school by encouraging a constructive learning atmosphere in school (Dickerson Mayes et al. 2014). In line with Strohmeier and Noam (2012), to reduce bullying in school teachers must promote a positive atmosphere in the school environment by promoting respect and empathy in the classroom situation. The attitude of teachers is significant in determining how they will manage and prevent school bullying (Wojciechowski, 2014). Teachers, according to the study participants must foster ethical behavior and for a teacher to be able to enforce these positive conducts among his student. He must be a role model to his student (Seaman, 2012). He must teach them the danger and consequences of bullying. Studies state that sometimes teachers have a problem in differentiating between aggressive conduct and peer skirmish (Strohmeier & Noam, 2012).

Teachers must receive periodic training on school bullying in order to maintain a reduced bullying environment in school. Other programs also should be organized for the teachers to help manage school bully. Such programs must incorporate how to identify the various type of school bullying (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2013; Yang and Salmivalli 2013). Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, and Johnson (2004) maintained that one of the primary roles of teachers is to identify bullying when it occurs. Several schools have incorporated official programs to arrest, avert and cut down bullying and these were said to be effective (Erwin-Jones, 2008).

In addition, relevant to school bullying is cyberbullying. Teachers get training on this and know how to handle it. With the changing nature of technology and the rapidity with which youth engage in technology, this has moved researchers to the realm of cyber environments and how physical environments and individuals are influenced and interact with these ever-changing context (Kowalski et al., 2014). Yang and Salmivalli (2013) claimed that bully/bullied are likely to assert their dominance in the form of cyberbullying and other digital forms of bullying to avoid face-to-face confrontations in which the bully/victim could be intimidated. These methods offer a free form of bullying and allow the assertion of aggression through the mask of anonymity and the protection of digital space. Eventually, the bully/victim is likely to escalate from this form of bullying into a more physically aggressive confrontational style as their confidence in asserting power is further reinforced through digital communication. The tutors are of the view that most ill conduct from the middle school is because of the home factor, low self-

confidence, peer pressure, and feeling of insecurity (Cornell & Mehta, 2011; Bandura, 1987).

The Role of Principals/Administration in Curtailing School Bullying

The principals as part of the student social circle play a substantial function in mitigating school bullying. They ensure that school bullying is reduced by initiating programs that deter bullying conduct in school in line with Harris and Hathorn (2006), who was of the view that schools should launch programs that will cut down the rate of bullying incidents in school. The school organizes programs that discourage bullying conduct in the school. Schools enforce and effect discipline and ensure that no child is left behind (Phillips & Cornell, 2012).

According to Kyriakides and Creemers (2013) in a study carried out between 1995 and 2000, principals were said to have voted more for protective issues more than risk aspects in their schools; though, the principals gave academic programs their uppermost priority undermining school bullying. However, this was followed by safeguarding school security and executing discipline programs (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2013). An effective principal should have the capability of communicating his goals and be able to exchange ideas with students and other members of the school. Principals who have these abilities to teach and pass their goal across to the school community will succeed in building a positive school environment (Phillips & Cornell 2012). Regrettably, previous research suggested that principals did not see bullying as problematic in schools. However, discipline records show the contrary (McDougall & Vailliancourt, 2015; Newgent et al., 2009).

Furthermore, to secure the school from bullying conduct, the principal should be more visible in places where bullying occurs most (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Additionally, the principals can work together with staff and faculty and advance suitable deterrence programs (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Regardless, principals can still organize programs that will help in cutting down school bullying. The principal is the significant figure in the success of a deterrence program because he sets the pace in the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). Therefore, it is the duty of the institution principal to know district regulations concerning school bullying and the position of the state law on school bullying (NCES, 2010).

Teacher-based programs, such as the "Bully Busters" program, provide educators with the proper and legally protected tools necessary to react to these activities (Bell et al., 2010). This program came through the recognition that the educators oversee organizing the learning environment and are often the first observers of any behavior problems. The concept is based on the understanding that educators are trained to teach and that the occurrences of bullying are based on the uninformed reaction to social settings. The teachers are trained to implement the learning of proper social skills into their daily learning activities. The program, when began at an early age, is proving to be at least somewhat effective in diminishing the occurrences of bullying.

Similarly, Seaman (2012) claimed that it is in the teachings of the classroom that the individual learns the social skills that are necessary to interact with one another properly and the empathy and compassion needed to intercede for the bullied. Seaman (2012) specifically offered a base curriculum for each course of study that serves as an

example of teaching empathy, understanding, and compassion. For instance, a history lesson involving the function of the bystanders during the Holocaust will allow the students to visualize themselves in this role. As the students understand the outcome for the victims, the ability to intervene will seem relevant. The teacher can then relate this to the bullying phenomenon. Seaman (2012) continued with examples of word problems in math, language barriers in communication, and even lyrics related to empathy in music. This approach is guided towards prevention and student-motivated intervention on behalf of the bullied.

While the role of teachers has been shown to be an essential mediator in the bullying environment, a better comprehension of the function of the family must be utilized in connection to the development of bully deterrence and preventives program. Bowes (2010) proposed that kids have good relationships with their family would have better adjustment results than would than children who lack such family affiliation. However, this shows that the process of recovering from these negative consequences is based on the relationships that the child has with caregivers and other adults. This would further lead to the assumption that the educators could also be enlisted in fostering appropriate relationships.

However, Bowes et al. (2010) claimed that the basis of a supportive family offers a fundamental foundation for the victims and often helps to end bullying scenarios long before the educators are made aware of the scenarios. Still, it is noteworthy to reiterate that just one participant in the bullying environment cannot burden educators who work in the bullying environment, with its attendant psychological consequences and

conditions but would be best shared by all participants. In addition to counseling the entire school, including non-participants and bystanders on anti-bullying concerns, it is also vital to discuss the connotation and purpose of life as this appears to be the primary factor that is missing among both victims and bullies. Moreover, this could easily be implemented through daily studies as suggested by Bell et al. (2010) where educators are in direct contact with the students. Noting that the suicide rate is much higher in participants of the bullying environment, directing the guidance away from suicidal ideation should be the primary concern of the anti-bullying campaign. Dickerson Mayes et al. (2014) noted that this would not only alleviate several the bullying occurrences but would also help to diminish the suicide rate among adolescents.

Victim-based interventions. There are significant variations in the consequences faced by the victims of bullying based on the self-perception of the victim label (Sharkey et al., 2015). For example, an individual who accepts the role of being a victim is more likely to exhibit symptoms of psychological disorders based on this victimization. This further explains the assertion made by Wong et al. (2013) that by accepting the role of the victim, the individual begins to internalize the claims of the bully. However, if the individual victim chooses to deflect this label, then they might succumb to the adverse effects and long-term implications of victimization. Therefore, Sharkey et al. (2015) offered a look at intervention through the ability to offset these victim labels and offer the students a more acceptable means of assessing and appreciating their differences from one another. Research through the lens of main participants is crucial and further

highlights the need for the present case study, which will provide future researchers with in-depth data on the nuances of the victim perspective, for example.

Policy solutions. Despite the growing social concern for bullying and the relatively slow speed at which interventions are implemented and evaluated, it is essential to understand the policy-level solutions that have aim at the bullying problem. For example, in a study of South Carolina's Safe School Climate Act 2006, Terry (2010) made a few assertions about policy-making and enforcing and made some recommendations. First, the implementation of a policy and intervention program is the most vital element. This implementation must involve members of the public and stakeholders in the child's future. Finally, working from the ground up by instilling values and fostering empathy will greatly increase the chances for a successful program.

Regardless of the program and the process of implementation, the primary focus of any anti-bullying movement must be to improve the quality of the school climate to foster a healthy level of conflict resolution and positive relationships among the students (McDougall & Vailliancourt, 2015). Ultimately, the school environment should be representative of a community system in which the social norms and moral values are encouraged to be shared about the way the students and staff members interact with one another. By setting up society rather than an authoritative regime, the school personnel will essentially encourage a healthy learning environment that is safe for all members of the student body. Further, Carter (2012) recognized the roles and relationships of the educators regarding the students in the school environment but encouraged special training for the teachers as the role regarding bullying and harassment shifts to that of

counseling. In this view, not only do the educators have the responsibility to prevent tragedies from occurring, but they must also deal with being so close to the scenario should a disaster occur despite their efforts.

Carter (2012) noted that they are also charged with providing comfort for the students after a tragedy and must be properly trained in handling these sensitive adolescents. In other words, teachers are not only in charge of providing textbook education to the students, but must also serve to teach social skills, acceptance, grief management, and conflict resolution while still trying to accept these situations for themselves. School districts must provide educators with the proper tools to deal with all these situations. Otherwise, the drive to mandate a program where the instructors are not properly equipped will result in detrimental effects for the programs, students, and educators alike (Carter, 2012).

The family. As mentioned previously, however, parents and families must also be properly equipped to intervene in the bullying process. Specifically, numerous emotions are involved when dealing with bullying occurrences. Carter (2012) noted that parents of victims might not view their child as being a victim just as parents of bullying may become defensive about the behavior of their child. The parents must have the proper resources to address these situations with objectivity while still being compassionate and understanding to prompt the students to communicate and discuss these issues with the parents (Carter, 2012; Keelan, Schenk, McNally, & Fremouw, 2014). The fine line and minimal room for mistakes when it comes to addressing these sensitive issues should prompt a detailed training program for parents and members of the community.

Otherwise, attempts to alleviate bullying may foster an environment for the occurrences to continue to expand (Carter, 2012).

The criminological context of bullying. While much of the literature reviewed has given grounds for the understanding that bullying contributes to a higher risk factor for suicide, the criminal courts have established a basis for finding fault in the perpetrator for the residual actions of the victims. While this approach is less attractive about the adolescents who exhibit such behaviors on the school property, one must not undermine the conscientious decisions to charge violent adolescents as adults when the violence is viewed as a direct cause for suffering. Eisenberg (2015) explained that, although the courts have always acknowledged emotional harm as being the result of a crime, the accuracy in determining the extent of the damage has created a difficulty in establishing exact criminal liability for the perpetrator. Even in the context of bullying, a victim who attacks a school violently is often implicated as being a criminal in an adult criminal court. In this vein, Rogers (2014) argued that bullying is the catalyst for the death of the suicidal victim, and the threat of being criminalized through being charged with a homicide may be the only way to deter such victimization in the adolescent and upcoming adult generation. Notably, however, free will and pre-existing conditions of the victim must also be taken into consideration, but Rogers (2014) claimed that the actions of the bully would not go unprosecuted (Rogers, 2014).

In the wake of these conflicting views, researchers have established not only the need for criminal liability foundations but also a formidable approach to obtaining these guidelines to elicit consequences before extreme cases of bullying. In the extreme cases

discussed by Rogers (2014), the bullies were charged in the deaths of their victims in the cases where the bullying led to the suicide of the victim. Eisenberg (2015) stated that the fear of physical harm could lead directly to emotional distress and that verbal bullying can portray this fear as being a reality. When the threat is repeatedly vocalized, or the individual is forced to alter their usual routine to avoid the threat or realization of the harm, then there is ample cause for criminal liability. Additionally, Eisenberg (2015) debunked the concept of physical proximity that was previously a requirement for such cases to be heard in a court of law. Specifically, Eisenberg (2015) noted the following as the catalysts for the change in this legal landscape:

Previously physical nearness was conventionally a requirement for any assault-connected crime, scientific advancement made this prerequisite outdated. The extensive usage of the telephone essentially altered the scenario and gave credence to telephone pestering laws; the contemporary internet era further rendered outdated the prerequisite of physical closeness and extended the scope of unlawful action (p. 634). In other words, Eisenberg (2015) argued that, as the phenomenon of harassment and bullying continues to evolve, the court systems must also evolve to include these new capabilities and understandings of technological and psychological advancements. This means that, as emotional distress has come to be recognized in the medical sciences, the court should assess this harm as equally damaging as that of the physical assaults.

Intervention research. While many scholars have suggested a particular format of bullying detection, prevention, and intervention methods, Bowllan (2011) approached the issue differently concerning a Catholic Middle School bullying program. He

discussed a detailed approach to deterrence grounded on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). The findings suggested that an interactive approach was more successful for female students than for their male peers. There were decreased occurrences of bullying across the student body. Similarly, in a case study of students in grades 4 to 6 participating in an interactive Youth Matters Prevention Program, which promoted positive perceptions of diversity and differences. Jenson, Brisson, Bender, and Williford (2013) found the program to be a successful promotion of healthy social skills at an early age. Further, as being potentially effective in the early prevention of escalated bullying environments in the later levels of the educational setting. Apart from determining the role of student social circle in the prevention of bullying and the efficacy of particularly interactive bullying deterrence plans, these findings state the importance of using the phenomenological method to the study of bullying behavior and bullying deterrence strategy.

The middle school environment. This present study deals with the duty of teachers' and principals' in bullying deterrence and bullying intervention plans at the middle school. An appraisal of literature about this period of the educational process will serve as a discussion for the necessity of a broader understanding of the roles of these individuals who form part of the student social circle in bullying preventions and these programs as they relate to the overall elimination of bullying. Directly approaching the middle school population, the literature reviewed will involve numerous areas of study including the changes that occur during this developing time and the rise in the occurrences of bullying in middle schools around the globe. Connecting these two areas

of study will allow for a better comprehension of the social phenomenon as it applies

directly to the middle school environment

Bullying occurrences are on the rise in the middle school age category and that

reports of bullying are not likely to account for all aspects of bullying, as the students are

not as frequently seasoned in the variations of the definitions of bullying (Goldweber,

Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). In other words, bullying is occurring much earlier, and

the need for earlier intervention programs is becoming more apparent. Domino (2013)

explained that bullying was once considered a concern of the older students as a socially

accepted rite of passage but is presently viewed as a social concern as the age of the

victims is lowering and the long-term status of the effects are extended. Specifically,

Domino (2013) noted that the occurrences are more frequent during the middle school

age and that these may diminish, but do not completely cease, throughout the higher

levels of education. Bullying in middle school is more frequently related to racial and

socio-economic factors (Goldweber et al., 2013). Moreover, ethnic differences also play a

substantial part in the occurrences of bullying throughout the middle school period

(Domino, 2013; Goldweber et al., 2013). Notice is given to the possibility that these are

areas of characteristics that do not change as opposed to the physical appearances that are

constantly changing at this age. In other words, the tendency to choose the victims based

on absolute differences appears to be the norm among the middle school-aged bullies.

Concerning the previous discussion of cyberbullying, middle school children have

increasing access to technology and freedom to utilize several social media sites with

little to no monitoring by their parents or other adult figures (Rice et al., 2015).

Therefore, the potential for the occurrences of bullying to extend beyond the school day and enter cyberbullying has also increased. The informed students are not likely to partake in bullying. Notwithstanding, this makes the necessity to integrate prevention and intervention programs at an early age much more apparent in the middle school environment. Further, the presence of bullying harassment in the middle and elementary schools has increased as the social acceptance of adolescent behaviors has been linked to lower age groups and the physical changes that are occurring earlier in these students (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Although occurrences of bullying in middle school are not new, the increase in these activities and the extremities of these occurrences are of great concern and justify the need for the current investigation and further comprehensive research of bullying in the middle school setting.

Middle school children are being bullied at a rate of nearly 25% and even higher in rural areas, though studies have also suggested bullying is higher in the urban areas (Packman et al., 2005). Regardless of the region or type of community that the school district is in, these reports suggest that they are many victims of bullying nationwide in the grade range of sixth through the tenth. The report puts the number of bullied at over three million (Packman et al., 2005). Notably, these are only the reported cases, and there is ample support to suggest that these age groups do not regularly report such events. Important to note too is the consequences associated with such a high percentage of bullying. Longitudinal studies have suggested an increase in the possession and use of weapons in a multi-nation study involving both male and female students (Perius, Brooks-Russell, Jing, & Iannotti, 2014). Although a decline in the occurrences of

bullying among male students between 1998 and 2010, other areas of violence were shown to have increased (Perius et al., 2014). This is assumed to be a subjective change in the definitions of bullying as the escalated offenses may have previously been bullying occurrences before the escalation of the use of firearms and other weapons. In other words, the decline in bullying is not portrayed as being a positive trend based on intervention method but rather serves as a warning for continued escalations of violent activities among this age group.

While bullying has been discussed in various contexts and across the globe, the present study addresses this social concern about the bullying occurrences within the middle school environment in Maryland. Because there have been fewer studies that deal with this specific demographic, care was taken to connect the literature reviewed specifically to the present study. Overall, the literature revealed that the state of Maryland is a trendsetter in bullying detection, prevention, and intervention programs and requirements of individual school districts regarding bullying programs, which offers an insight into the development of the specific programs that are presently being researched, as well as underscores the need for the present study.

Bullying can take different methods such as bodily and emotional forms. Precisely, female students have a higher tendency to partake in bullying regarding emotional distress such as exclusion and name calling, whereas their male counterparts participate in more physical bullying than do the females (City of Baltimore, Behavior Health Systems Baltimore, 2014). However, this can be attributed to the social role of male dominance that is frequently fostered by the male psyche from a young age, while

females are commonly taught to fit in or become popular through appearance. In both

scenarios, the bully plays on the victim's desire to fill these roles and their own

dominance to prevent this from happening. Further, the physiognomies of bullies are

based on their need to assert power, while the characteristics of victims often exhibit the

feelings of powerlessness (City of Baltimore, Behavior Health Systems Baltimore, 2014;

Boulton, 2013). The primary similarity between the two is the need for counseling to

balance the need for control and the capability to feel in charge of one's actions (City of

Baltimore, Behavior Health Systems Baltimore, 2014).

Several schools in some states are taking the phenomenon of bullying with an

aggressive agenda and without the overlying presence of previously attempted prevention

and intervention methods (Barnett, 2014). Moreover, there is pressure from the school

board and legislature to minimize and reduce the number of school suspensions to allow

for more school hours to be completed by all members of the student body (Barnett,

2014). As some of the suspensions within some of the school districts have been linked to

the occurrences of bullying, the school administrators have found themselves in a

desperate need to end this global issue within the walls of the individual schools rather

than waiting on a collective approach. Giving the specific example of the bullying

program at the Holabird Academy in Northeast Baltimore, Maryland, Barnett (2014)

pointed out that the school administrators have allied with the University of Maryland's

School of Law. This alliance allows the future attorneys to gain experience in mediation

while the students at the Holabird Academy in Northeast Baltimore to learn the necessary

skills to discuss their issues in a supervised setting. The program has been highly

successful, and the school has seen a dramatic drop in the suspension rate, as well as reports of bullying on the school grounds (Barnett, 2014).

However, as discussed previously, the precise definition of bullying that can be used by parents and educators to discuss these occurrences with students is an apparent abuse of power by any individual against another (Wojciechowski, 2014). Wojciechowski (2014) further urged parents to do everything in their power to maintain open communication with their student. With the numerous negative consequences that have been evaluated, Wojciechowski (2014) claimed that families have a significant duty to their kids about preventing and intervening in the occurrences of bullying. Similarly, Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) pointed out that the occurrences of bullying that are viewed within the city of Baltimore, Maryland, can be attributed to the levels of community violence that are also viewed within the city. Noting that the school environment reflects the community environment, Barnett (2014) called for a community change program to change the way that the students view the proper manner to resolve conflicts, acknowledge differences, and form relationships. Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) stated that the tendency for the children to act similarly should not be surprising, but instead should be considered as an alert to the community environment of the city.

The answer to the violent tendencies and bullying occurrences does not lie in the students or the schools but rather lies in the community to make drastic changes in the way that differences are resolved (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Absenteeism in early education has been shown to be a catalyst for low academic achievement, low self-esteem, and depression (Chang & Jordan, 2011). All this concern, although nationally and

globally recognized, some states are aggressively attacking the issue of school attendance through several programs to establish education as being the primary focus of the school personnel and the students (Chang & Jordan, 2011). Moreover, the state of Maryland and some other states have been noted for paying close attention to the number of students who are chronically absent, and the school system has been actively amending the attendance and discipline policies, as well as minimizing the number of absences that occur due to suspensions with a high rate of success (Chang & Jordan, 2011). These changes have been taking place before the requirements of the federal government, which shows a very proactive approach and a positive reflection on the school districts. The state of Maryland has been a leader in these areas as the barriers to a safe and positive learning environment are being actively addressed (Chang & Jordan, 2011).

Summary and Conclusions

The course of this literature review has taken several intended, as well as a few unintended turns and levels of understanding about the occurrences of bullying. Each of these areas of interest has led to a more comprehensive course of action when establishing the criteria for the present study. Additionally, the literature review has offered background and implications for future studies by evaluating the assumptions and limitations of the available literature.

Considering the definitions that were presented in the literature reviewed, several implications added to the present study. First, I started the investigation with the understanding of bullying with the participants, as there are numerous variations and subjective views about this subject. Additionally, the defining characteristics of bullying

were presented while they were making recommendations for the intervention programs; this prompted accurate responses from the participants. Nevertheless, this also aided in understanding the rise of the social interests in the bullying environment as the subjective context has been utilized to draw media attention to the problem.

The comprehension of the different participants and the characteristics of these participants have aided in the approach to the detection of potential and present victims, bullies, bully/victims, and bystanders. By being able to recognize specific characteristics, it will be possible to address these individuals in the early stages of the bullying occurrences and at the least diminish the consequences of these occurrences. Furthermore, the literature has prompted more understanding of the consequences both presently and in the adult life of the adolescent victims. All the same, this shows the need for an effective program that eliminates these occurrences and safeguards the potential victims. Considering the mutable nature of the meaning of bullying and victimhood, the environment in which bullying occurs, Swearer and Hymel's (2015) definition will ultimately become relevant in determining the best options for intervention programs, since the primary issue is not found in the bully or the victim, but rather in the entirety of the complex social group.

The present study helps address one of the gaps in the literature by generating a body of knowledge, data, and information on the effect of school bullying from the perception of the school tutors and administrators. Furthermore, the research also reports on the measures or programs that will be most useful in combating school bullying. The knowledge generated from this research will help researchers comprehend the trends and

dynamics arising from school bullying. The research outcome, if properly executed, could propel social change by plummeting the rates of failures in schools, reduce the incidents of homicide and students taking their life resulting from school bullying, and decrease other anti-social behaviors associated with school bullying.

While several approaches were addressed throughout the literature review, there were numerous similarities in these considerations that will allow for a more in-depth assessment of the methods that are presented in the present study. By understanding the scientific basis for these similarities, it was possible to analyze the present studied programs through the lenses of previous research. Although this does not serve as a final measure of effectiveness, it aids in the establishment of the phenomenon and guides the research questions. Keeping in mind that the differences between the studies reviewed did not necessarily mean that one program was more effective or successful than any of the others aided in reducing bias.

Finally, the literature review was guided to connect to the current study through evaluating the role of the teachers, principals who form part of the student social circle and an appraisal of the middle school and the present state of the bullying deterrence programs that are being utilized in schools. The study of the middle school environment suggested a strong need for integrating successful measures. However, this led the present research towards evaluating the reportedly successful school district about the documented increase in bullying in the average middle school environment.

Chapter 3 offers a comprehensive discussion on the type of exploration method used for the investigation. The exploration consists of the theoretic tradition of analysis,

study sample and population, the method of data collection and procedures, data

management procedures, the system of data investigation, problems of quality and ethical

deliberations, investigator's duty, investigator and participants' bias, and lastly, the

participants' protection.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The aim of this exploration was to investigate how teachers and principals at a U.S. middle school perceive the school's existing bullying programs and recommendations about how to improve the programs. School bullying is associated with deep-rooted problems in modern society. The issues arising from bullying in schools such as homicide, suicide, and the school dropout rate have become a public policy concern that warrants an in-depth assessment (Strøm et al., 2013). To address the research problem and answer the study questions, I used a qualitative phenomenological method for gathering relevant data and performing data processing and analysis. The details of the method and the study design are provided in this chapter. The chapter contains these sections: (a) the research design and rationale; (b) the role of the researcher; (c) criteria for participant selection; (d) instrumentation; (e) measures for recruitment, participation and data collection; (f) data analysis plan; and (g) problems of trustworthiness, including ethical procedures. The chapter ends with a summary of important points.

Research Design and Rationale

The current investigation consists of a qualitative phenomenological study of the contexts of school bullying in a middle school. The phenomenon explored in this study was how teachers and principals at a chosen middle school perceive the school's existing bullying programs because this was aligned with the subject of the exploration. The aim of this phenomenological exploration was to explore how teachers and principals at a U.S. middle school perceive the school's existing bullying programs and elicit

recommendations about how to improve the programs. The main research question (RQ1)

and sub-research questions (RSQ1 and RSQ2) follow.

RQ1. How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying at a

middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory?

RSQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students,

contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

RSQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of

the students' social environment within the school?

I determined that a qualitative phenomenological design was the most effective

design to answer the research questions. A qualitative design is employed when the data

being collected concern a real-life account, experiences, and other observable data that

may not be tangibly measured (Yin, 2014). I selected a qualitative phenomenological

design based on the intention of the investigation and the nature of data to be gathered.

More specifically, I used an exploratory phenomenological design for this study.

Phenomenology was the right design for this exploration because it emphasizes the

comprehensive investigation of the lived experiences of participants through the use of

different types of interviews (Moustakas, 1994). The study questions are in alignment

with the phenomenological study hence the reason the design was employed in the study.

Similarly, phenomenology is a design that is suitable when the research does not require

the control setting of a research laboratory though remaining accurate to the goals of

shared information from research laboratory (Moustakas, 1994). Hence, in this

exploration, I used a qualitative method with a phenomenological design which effectively answered my research questions.

Furthermore, a phenomenological strategy was a fitting design because it allowed me to get the valuable data from the study participants' experiences in answering the research question (Moustakas, 1994). The approach permitted exhaustive exploration of lived experiences of the study participants, who gave insight into their experiences in witnessing the phenomenon under study (see Moustakas, 1994). The design allowed the gathering of insight on school bullying from the teachers and principals/administrators, who are members of the students' social circle (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology permits the abstraction and investigation of knowledge from the experiences of the participants (Berger, 2015). Consequently, I relied exhaustively on the experiences of the study participants in the data gathering.

I preferred phenomenology to ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative because it is only through the examination of the experiences of the participants that I answered the research questions and attained meaningful results. I did consider other research designs but found them not suitable based on my study questions and the purpose of the investigation. A case study was not appropriate because the current research is about the lived experiences of the target population instead of their perceptions (Yin, 2014). Likewise, grounded theory was not appropriate for this investigation since there was no need to develop a theory grounded on data that would be methodically collected, experimentally grounded, and inductively investigated (Gentles, Jack, Nicholas, & McKibbon, 2014). Similarly, I determined that a narrative research

design was not suitable for this exploration, as there was no need for qualitative data that is offered in a story and sequential procedure to explore the phenomenon being investigated (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). I concluded that phenomenology was the best design for this exploration because it permitted data to be collected based on the experiences of the study participants on the issue under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). According to Polkinghorne (2005), the focal point of qualitative phenomenology is the recounting by participants of their experience on the subject matter and the deeper understanding and description of the human experience this recounting provides.

Role of the Researcher

As an investigator, I was the instrument for data gathering. I conducted an analysis of the data collected during the interviews. First, I hand coded the data following Gibbs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) data analysis process. I applied epoche before utilizing Moustaka's (1994) modified Van Kaam seven steps to avoid personal prejudice and biases by using participants' responses and experience in answering the interviewing questions. Subsequently, I applied Moustakas's phenomenological data analysis process by utilizing his modified Van Kaam seven steps in analyzing the data. To eliminate bias, none of the research participants were relatives, personal friends, or members of my social network.

Qualitative phenomenology is a research design in which the investigator is deeply involved with the participants' experiences since qualitative phenomenology studies center on "re-counting, understanding, and clarifying a human experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.139). However, this brought in several issues into play such as

personal, strategic, and ethical issues. I, being the interviewer, also eliminated personal

bias by adhering to interview protocols, recognizing values, biases, and background such

as history, gender, and economic circumstances that could have influenced the study. I

handled the issue of gaining entrance to the research area and other ethical issues that

were involved. As the researcher for this investigation, I also acted as the observer, data

collector, and data analyzer.

As an interviewer, my role was professional and direct. I conducted the interviews

thoroughly and used appropriate methods of data interpretation (Yin, 2014). My study in

education, specifically as it relates to bullying, has influenced my life significantly. The

inspiration for this project was predicated on the damaging effects experienced by

students who are subject to bullying (My children were not left out of those who were

also bullied for their accent when we first came to the United States as immigrants). The

lack of data available regarding concrete ways to substantially mitigate bullying has led

to this work. Ethical issues came up in the study relating to the responsibility owed to the

participants. As the interviewer, I maintained confidentiality, according to Patton (2002).

However, this was addressed by not disclosing the confidential information of the

participants. The informed consent form provided for confidentiality to the effect that any

information provided remained confidential and that I would not use their individual

information for any reason other than for this study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population in this exploration included middle school teachers and principals/administrators who had experienced school bullying by witnessing it and have an association with students who have been involved in school bullying incidents. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the focal point of a qualitative phenomenology study is the participants' recounting their experiences on the subject matter, understanding, and describing the human experience. The choice of participants consisted of those who were willing and able to relate a sequence of deep experiences, full, and inundated accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). In sampling procedures, representativeness is not the decisive factor in the order of importance; instead, the experience of the participants was most important. The sample consisted of two groups: teachers and principals/administrators.

The sample was chosen based on established inclusion and exclusion principles. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) teacher, principal, or administrator of the student involved in a bullying case, (b) must have known the student for at least 12 months, and (c) must be aware of the bullying incident, which the student experienced in school. The exclusion criteria included: (a) those with mental disorders and (b) those who are implicated in a bullying case in the middle school.

In this study, purposive sampling was used in selecting participants who were key informants. Participants purposefully selected were enthusiastic about participating and contributed meaningfully to the research, as is suggested by Barratt, Ferris, and Lenton

(2015). Vital informants are those who will provide valuable data and understanding of the problem being explored, and who can also recognize other areas of use for greater insight and clarification (Moustakas, 1994). Within the framework of this research, the main informers interviewed were the classroom teachers and school principals/administrators who have experienced school bullying and have experience of potential bullying programs. Data were collected from participants in the natural setting where the incidents occurred (Patton, 2002).

In this research, I collected data from 10 designated middle school teachers and principals who gave wide-ranging data concerning the investigation. Investigators of qualitative exploration have revealed that the sample scope for research of this nature is typically from 6 to 25 participants to reach data capacity (Walker, 2012). Data saturation is the point in data gathering when there are marginal and insignificant changes in the data with the addition of new samples or participants (Walker, 2012). Researchers claim that to reach data saturation 10 to 20 participants are usually needed for a standard qualitative phenomenology study (Walker, 2012).

To facilitate purposive sampling, I contacted the chosen school to ask for reports of bullying. Next, I went through the cases and research on the contact information of teachers and principals who have been involved in bullying cases. Furthermore, I requested recommendations from informed school personnel for the names of teachers and principals who they felt were most knowledgeable in the cases of bullying in their school. I contacted all potential participants through phone calls to ask them to be part of the study. During the phone call, I screened the participants based on the inclusion

criteria. Participants were then contacted through email, which contained the invitation

for participation. In accepting the request, an arrangement was made for a subsequent

phone call or email to the respective participant. These procedures ware arranged to

decide on the formal time to meet. An informed consent form was shared, signed, and

collected from teachers and principals who were willing to participate.

Instrumentation

The primary source of data was face-to-face interviews. In qualitative work,

interviews are key sources of data collection (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Survey and

questionnaire methods were also considered, but to gain in-depth and rich data about

relevant lived experiences, being a qualitative phenomenological design, interviews were

chosen in line with Dixson, Singleton, and Straits (2015). Interviews were utilized in

obtaining information from those participating in the study as the roles of teachers and

principals in managing school bullying, and as active in the existing anti-bullying

programs in the school. I employed a face-to-face interview, utilizing open-ended

questions (Appendix A). I conducted interviews with classroom teachers and principals

who have in-depth knowledge of bullying. In conducting the interviews, I was guided by

an interview protocol (Appendix B). Based on the items listed in the interview protocol, I

had a structure to use to conduct the flow of the interview. However, I also asked

additional questions to collect more relevant data as was needed for the study.

All items in the interview protocol were subjected to an expert review as part of

the experimental testing of the study and for the improved credibility of the interview.

The experts were composed of my dissertation committee. In the expert review, the

structure, content, and wording of the items were evaluated for appropriateness to the study and overall correctness as a means of responding to the different questions used in the study. The frequent feedback from the expert review was the basis for the modifications to the research questions and the interview protocol.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

When interviewing the study participants, I was guided by the interview protocol. The participants in this exploration were nominated grounded on their perceptions and experiences with the research phenomenon and were able to give direct insights from their perceptions and experiences on school bullying as witnessed by them in the school. Moustakas (1994) stated that in a phenomenological study that experience is the critical foundation of knowledge, and it is a valid source that cannot be questioned. Consequently, the participants' understanding, perceptions, and experiences of school bullying, their role in managing it and the effectiveness of the bullying deterrence program were a vital factor of the findings offered in this investigation. The interviews contained all the questions to gain comprehensive information to respond to the exploratory questions. Throughout the interviews, I met the participants in the school after school hours. The interviews led to a thorough comprehension of the study participants' experiences of school bullying and the role of teachers and principal in preventing school bullying through their experiences of the bullying they witnessed in the school.

To begin the interview session, I greeted the participants, introduced the study, and reviewed the content of the informed consent. During the actual interview, I asked

questions based on the interview protocol. I asked additional questions to obtain more relevant data when needed. After all the questions had been exhausted, I informed the participant that the interview was over. However, this was also the time in which the participants were able to ask any questions for clarification. In this manner, I addressed the concerns of the participants. Afterward, I expressed appreciation to the study contributors for creating time to be part of the research.

The interviews were digitally recorded; this allowed for maximum engagement between the participants and I and minimized any pauses between questions. In this study, 10 interviews were conducted with teachers and principals that had handled bullying cases within the chosen school. These interviews lasted for 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the length of the answers and the speech rates of the participants.

After the interview, I transcribed the interview transcripts on my laptop. After completing all the transcripts, I conducted a transcript review in which the participants were able to view their transcripts and initial interpretations of the interview data. In this process, the participants reviewed the areas where changes may have been needed because of misinterpretations or wrong transcription. At the end of the study, I met with the study participants to reiterate the aim and the result of the study.

Data Analysis Plan

In qualitative studies, data analysis starts with data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Because this investigation emphasized the subjective recollection of the lived experiences of teachers and principals who experienced bullying by witnessing it in the school, the

data was handled with care. Early in the data collection process, preliminary analyses were used to identify new findings or themes that improved future observations.

First, I analyzed the data for each research question by hand coding the data using the Gibs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard (2003) data analysis process. I applied epoche before utilizing the Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam seven steps to avoid personal prejudice and bias while using the participants' responses and experience in answering the interview questions. The term invariant signifies any pertinent expression, statement, or element found in the contributor interview replies (Cole, Chase, Couch, & Clark, 2011).

Subsequently, the documented interviews were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) seven steps:

1. Listing and initial grouping of written data: I listed all expression appropriate to the subject under investigation through horizontalization. In horizontalization, as the analyst, I developed a synopsis of non-repetitive and non-overlapping significant reports.

2. Decrease and exclusion of the invariant leitmotifs: All expressions that did not meet the specified requirements, together with monotonous, unclear, and overlying expressions were left out from the investigation or reviewed for a further accurate expressive form. I identified and evaluated each expression based on two criteria: (a) any look or glance that helps in comprehending the data and (b) if a look can be abstracted and branded to make it fit the what is being related.

3. Clustering and thematizing common themes: I clustered the common themes that were associated with the investigation.

4. For the final documentation of the ideas for verification: I identified the commonalities and finalized the themes through following the evaluative criteria for the themes to ensure they were (a) articulated clearly and (b) complementary.

5. Creation of a person textural account of the experience: I utilized the appropriate authenticated invariant themes to generate a single account of the experience.

6. Creation of a person operational portrayal of the experience: I grounded this account on the person's textual account.

7. The creation of a textual account of the meanings, and the experiences of the participants taking into deliberation the invariant principles.

Stages 1 to 4 of Moustakas's (1994) revised Van Kaam technique were followed to help code the information and generate thematic types.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The qualitative study aimed to reach a deep understanding of an occurrence, which is vital in appraising the elements of which make up the phenomenon of bullying. Quantitative studies, which assess trustworthiness by how well the level of threat to internal validity has been controlled, unlike the qualitative exploration which determines value by creating reliability, transferability, trustworthiness, and conformability (Yin, 2014). The significance of creating reliability in a qualitative study can be framed using Stake's (2013) principles to create reliability. Trustworthiness suggests that the use of the study process is noteworthy. Dependability suggests the investigation is duplicable, given

a comparable location; transferability stipulates that the exploration is generalizable to other studies and areas, and conformability demonstrates that the researcher acknowledges some measure of subjectivity.

Threats to internal validity or credibility often undermine the findings revealed through the analysis of observational data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In safeguarding the validity of the gathered information and data appraisal, the data was gathered, analyzed, and interpreted in a manner, which accurately comprehends and relates the pertinent beliefs, activities, and viewpoints of participants (Miles et al., 2014). There were numerous structures used in the current study intended to optimize validity though lessening researcher prejudice (Patton, 2002). For instance, the transcript review procedures safeguarded the outcomes, were unbiased, and revealed that the research strategy was valid during the investigation; consequently, improving credibility (Miles et al., 2014). For transferability, I provided a complete and thorough account of the approaches included in implementing the method of the investigation. Therefore, a future investigator can replicate the study with other populations. Finally, an emphasis was placed on the participant's perceptions if they understood the information they shared and if it matched what they had intended to share.

Secondly, the iterative questioning was aligned via the utilization of the appropriate data gathering procedure to produce comprehensive data and to unearth any aspect that may have been missing (Miles et al., 2014). In this way, the materials gathered were considered authentic. Thirdly, the conformability of the outcomes was improved by recognizing any individual biases, to enable me to appraise the material with

impartiality as recommended by Watkins (2012). Fourthly, dependability assured using a review process, as interviews and observations were documented at each phase of the investigation method as well as kept in a study log. Lastly, the participants engaged in the study were informed that confidentiality was certain; this ensured that the participants could share their experiences candidly and without fear of being identified. Following Maxwell's (2013) suggestion, the identity of participants was not disclosed. The data was kept in a protected database and will be discarded after 10 years.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical values are the foundation of all form of study; to perform unethically would disavow the study's aims and put the participants at risk (Maxwell, 2013). To behave ethically demands that nobody will be harmed, either bodily or psychologically. Ethical conduct also builds confidence among the participants, while enhancing responsiveness (Maxwell, 2013). When I received permission from the Institutional Review Board, it enabled me to conduct this study by obtaining informed consent from every participant in the study (Maxwell, 2013). I took necessary precautions to avert any unethical actions, like the non-compliance of nondisclosure contracts, or the betrayal of confidentiality. The goal was to be mindful of any ethical impasses and to modify the study's method, rules, and procedures throughout the process to aid in preserving ethical measures (Canagarajah & Stanley, 2015). I utilized well-defined protocols in this study, which similarly set limits for suitable and ethical conduct.

Consequently, adhering to the principles were defined utilizing the informed consent form as well. The informed consent instrument has an account of the research,

dangers, and benefits accruable to study contributors, their functions, and privileges, as

well as a researcher affidavit. Further, this information was succinctly presented to allow

the participants to make an informed choice regarding their involvement in the

investigation, in line with Canagarajah and Stanley (2015). I was forthright, candid, and

maintained integrity as the researcher, a method recommended by researchers Maxwell

(2013) and Miller, Birch, Mauthner, and Jessop (2012), and did not allow personal

interest to prevail or manifest at any time. Unprincipled actions, like misrepresenting

data, altering outcomes, or twisting data to get results that are more satisfactory, did not

occur. Objectivity was maintained throughout the data gathering and investigation stages

of the investigation. Although there was no cohort with which to verify data, there was

accurate recording and analysis of the data, with an emphasis placed on coding the

information relevantly and without bias, the hallmark of reliable data gathering and

sharing (Miles et al., 2014). The study questions utilized in this exploration were essential

to the development of the study. Therefore, the questions posed to teachers and principals

were open to amendment, as was the data sought after in the observational period.

Comprehensive and precise field journal, which documented where the study

activities were kept. The field journal contained my recording time, according to Patton

(2002). Appropriate persons were granted access to the document under the context of the

necessary disclosure. However, this method was protected against any misconduct,

though a thorough, methodical practice that permits the study outcomes to be replicated

(Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Data is kept in a safe location, and subsequently will

be discarded after 10 years to prevent it from getting into the hand of other researchers who may misuse it (Maxwell, 2013).

Summary

The purpose of this exploration was to explore the perceptions of individuals associated with students at a chosen middle school (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators, and principals), their experiences of bullying, and the success of the school's bullying prevention program within the chosen school. Furthermore, this section described the numerous approaches and procedures that were used in this study. The chapter presented the methods that were adopted in data collection and interpretation, including study design and justification, methodology, the research questions, the researcher's role, investigation site, data gathering methods, data analysis technique, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and limitations. The phenomenological method was determined as the most appropriate process as it offered an exhaustive account of lived experiences on the subject matter (Miles et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2012). Individual interviews were employed for the investigation (Miles et al., 2014). The study included 10 participants. The participants were purposefully selected. Data was hand-coded and analyzed utilizing the improved Van Kaam phenomenology data analysis strategy (Moustakas, 1994). The findings were validated with numerous sources of data, rich accounts, and transcript review. Chapter 4 presents data analysis and the results of the investigation.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this section, I present the procedures used in carrying out this investigation, including details of the research setting; participants' demographics; the sample recruitment method; procedures for data collection, storage, and data analysis; and evidence of trustworthiness. In this phenomenological qualitative study, I explored the perceptions and experiences of 10 middle-school teachers and principals/administrators of bullying. I examined the role of the school personnel in managing school bullying and assessed whether the school's bullying deterrence program was successful. I examined the experiences of the two social groups (teachers and principals/administrators) who deal directly with students regarding bullying and antibullying programs. The interview questions were derived from the research questions, which were, as follows:

RQ1. How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying at a middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory?

RSQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

RSQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?

I answered the research questions by using the responses to the interview questions by the 10 school personnel, consisting of 6 teachers and 4 principals, in the study. I employed open-ended interview questions to obtain the replies of the study participants about their concerns regarding school bullying and bullying deterrence

procedures in their school. I appraised the participants' responses to identify their views in relation to the study questions and the theoretical foundations of this study. I employed a qualitative phenomenology, which permitted the collection of data based on the experiences of the study participants concerning the issue under investigation. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the focal point of qualitative phenomenology is the participants' recounting of their experiences on the subject matter, which allows more understanding of the human experience. The qualitative design is appropriate for investigating problems, understanding occurrences, and responding to issues via multiple data sources (Fielding, 2005). I recorded what the participants said in their own words and reduced their experiences into an account that makes up the study.

Setting

I engaged participants from the staff of the chosen middle school. The participants responded favorably to the consent forms. After obtaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval number 03-17-17-0308958), I extended an invitation via e-mail to prospective participants as well as an informed consent form. Those who consented were subsequently recruited as participants. I sent an e-mail to the school principal stating that I was ready to begin the study at the site. I followed up on this e-mail by visiting the research site to discuss how I would carry out the study in the school. The school administrator and I discussed the implications that my findings might have on the school. The administrator approved my contacting the school's teachers and principals and inviting them to partake in the exploration. I arranged the interviews at the research site.

Demographics

I obtained the participants' demographic data, including names, designations, grade level taught, and years of experience. The demographic data are presented in Table 1. Each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym to protect the participant's privacy. The table illustrates that 90% of the school personnel in the study were considered very experienced, with more than 5 years of experience in their various designations. In contrast, Care had only 3 years of teaching experience as seen in the table 1. Only two male teachers participated in this study. See Tables 1 below:

Table 2

Teacher Demographics

Participant	Gender	Designation	Years of experience
JO	Male	Principal	8
Naomi	Female	Teacher	10
Ruth	Female	Principal	8
Glory	Female	Teacher	4
Faith	Male	Teacher	6
Denny	Female	Principal	5
House	Female	Teacher	8
JJ	Female	Teacher	7
San	Female	Principal	6
Care	Female	Teacher	3

Data Collection

The school administrator granted me permission to communicate with the teachers. Subsequently, I invited them to partake in the study. I arranged the interviews to take place on the school premises. I gathered information mainly from the interviews and from the contemporary literature. I purposefully recruited 10 participants who met the requirements for participating in the study. Each of the participants said that he or she had

experienced school bullying, had perception and knowledge of the phenomenon, and had witnessed the occurrence of bullying in their school.

I collected data mainly from interviews. The interview protocol was the basis for the questions in this exploration. I used open-ended questions. Subsequently, from the participants' responses the main data emerged which thoroughly answered the study questions. The experiences recounted and described by the study participants were pertinent to the study questions. The responses generated rich textual data. I used Moustakas's (1994) revised Van Kaam data analysis process, which benefited the study. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of the teachers and principals in a middle school regarding school bullying and bullying deterrence programs. The participants shared their experiences of school bullying, the bullying intervention programs, and programs that could best curb bullying in their school.

I chose the participants based on their experiences with the research phenomenon. Participants in the study were able to give direct accounts of their experiences on school bullying as witnessed by them in the school. Moustakas (1994) stated that in a phenomenological study experience and perception are the critical basis of knowledge. I interviewed 10 participants utilizing face-to-face interviews in a room within the school after school hours. The interviews lasted for 25 to 30 minutes. I recorded each interview and took field notes in my research journal. I also documented important information about the participants' demeanors and nuances while responding to the interview questions. If the participants' responses contained ambiguity, I asked follow-up questions

for clarity. At the completion of the interviews, I listened to the audio recordings. I compared the contents with notes taken in my research journal. I then transcribed the recordings to my laptop, which I secured with a password identified only by me. The data collection and transcription process lasted 6 weeks.

The phenomenological strategy enabled me to focus on the detailed experience of the study participants (Patton, 2002). Using the research journal was essential to record and capture unique information built on the specific experiences of the study participants. I numbered the pages of the research journal and structured it by splitting each page of the journal into three sections. One section recorded observations, another section recorded experiences, and the last segment recorded emotion. Consequently, the participant body language formed part of the thought, observation, and experiences taken into consideration while interviewing the 10 study participants.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interview, to capture the essence of what was said about the phenomenon under investigation, I went through the participants' responses and checked the research journal to ensure the validity of the findings. I used the phenomenology data analysis method based on Moustakas's (1994) revised Van Kaam method to code the data gathered and created thematic groupings. Using specified words revealed themes in both idea and expression, accounted for in the interview responses of the participants (Cole et al., 2011).

Following the data analysis process as enunciated by Gibbs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard (2003). I hand coded the data, which were taken from bigger

representations by assembling them into categories and themes. I coded the interviews as patterns and themes emerged. The authentication of the themes enabled me to create individual textural accounts from the 10 transcripts to give further credence to the invariant elements created at the preliminary phases of the investigation. According to Moustakas (1994), these descriptions provide a clear perspective of the experience, including thoughts and feelings as well as the suggested use of verbatim examples. I constructed a structural account of the teachers and principals' experiences of school bullying in the school environment. Employing creative variation, Moustakas (1994) posited that investigators create basic themes that further explain the invariant components and general structures which illustrate how school bullying might manifest in another circumstance.

Moustakas (1994) further stated that the description should offer a distinctive viewpoint that will reflect the experience, thoughts, and moods of the participants. I constructed the participant's operational accounts and experiences of school bullying inside the school setting, as well as their accounts of any bullying programs available within the school. Employing creative difference, Moustakas (1994) posited that the investigator constructs primary themes that further demonstrate the invariant elements and general structures that illustrate how school bullying could manifest in other areas. This procedure helped in recognizing shapes, themes, ideas, and connotations in the contributors' answers to the interview questions, thereby revealing the underlying meaning of the expression (Sharkey et al. 2015).

I applied epoche before using the Moustakas modified Van Kaam method to avoid personal prejudice and bias. I set aside my own beliefs and idiosyncrasies, using the responses of the participants in understanding how the participants experienced and responded to bullying in the school environment. After applying epoche, as required in a phenomenological study, I then utilized the Moustakas (1994) revised van Kaam procedure to analyze the data. The procedure offered an organized method of examining the phenomenological data. Moustakas (1994) posited that the seven-step process is one of the best methods of data analysis.

Moustakas's Step 1: Listing and Grouping/Horizonalization

I implemented this step by listing and grouping the data. Every statement was treated as having equal value and benefit—a process that is known as horizonalization. The horizonalization process led me to identify the invariant constituents related to the phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), horizonalization is an important part of the process of phenomenological modified van Kaam data analysis. Horizonalization allowed me to better understand the experience described by the participant from a nonbiased perspective. I mandatorily evaluated each statement independently while reviewing the transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) presented horizonalization to highlight textural connotation and recognize invariant constituents. Horizonalization is a part of the phenomenological data reduction process (Moustakas, 1994). The following excerpt is an exact instance of horizonalizing to highlight textural meaning and recognize invariant constituents. Each statement was given equal value in understanding the participants' perception and experiences relating to school bullying.

Participant Responses, Example 1

Researcher: "We are going to talk about bullying, the causes of bullying in the school environment. What are the causes of bullying in the school setting?"

Participant Jo, "One of the causes of bullying is low self-esteem. The bully wants to feel popular, so they try and pick on someone they feel is weak." Participant Jo was of the view that the principal cause of bullying in the school is attributed to low self-esteem and the student not having confidence in himself.

Researcher: "How can your experiences with school bullying influence how you addressed this issue?"

Participant Jo, "My lived experiences with bullying greatly affects the way I deal with bullying. From my experiences, I know bullying is destructive. Right from the beginning of the school year, I try to encourage positive behavior in class. Send those who are involved in bullying to the school counselor."

Researcher: "How do you feel about school bullying in general?"

Participant Jo: "I feel school bullying is destructive and bad and should be discouraged at all levels. It creates an unhealthy environment in the school. It has made the victim do things they should not do like withdrawing themselves, becoming depressed, and even committing suicide in some cases."

The transcript of Jo's interview contains her experiences that are helpful and enough to comprehend the phenomenon of school bullying. Through the process of Horizonalization, I identified the invariant constituents and textural meaning as she gives

an account of her experience of school bullying. Her statements contain the components necessary to understand that school bullying is destructive and must be treated seriously.

Moustakas's Step 2: Reducing the Data

The second step involved reducing the data to the essential ideas, or invariant elements of the experience. Statements that did not meet these criteria were eliminated: such as repetitive, vague, or overlapping data. These aspects were deleted or presented in more descriptive terms. I analytically condensed the responses to the interview questions going in order of their significance to the central research problem. To carry out this, I measured responses that agreed with 80% of the responses related to the central idea of the research questions. Moustakas (1994) also talked about the meaning unit which he said are comparable to horizonalization, which permits the identification of every statement and expression as a single, vital constituent of the experience. Moustakas (1994) stated that the meaning units form part of phenomenological reduction that allows the researcher to extend listening to create textures and meaning from the responses made by the study participants. Each response was rated equally, assigning the same value to the experience as defined by the participant, a witness to school bullying. These selections are taken precisely from the transcripts, and the statements were recognized as the invariant constituents of the experiences. Participant Ruth described the way her experience of bullying has affected the way she handles bullying issues in the following way:

(1) That as a teacher she has seen bullying have a severe impact on students, and she points it out to the student that bullying is dangerous.

(2) That she takes prompt action to stop bullying conduct in the school, if she determines that bullying has taken place, she makes the "bully" complete a form, and an investigation is initiated.

(3) She encourages the students to speak out on time and to tell the bully to stop.

(4) She encourages the students to alert an adult.

(5) For the "bully," she makes them understand that bullying is a choice and that they must learn how to make a positive decision since they are liable for their wrongful conduct.

Participant Faith stated that her experience with bullying has made her try to discourage students from bullying and let them know that if they do not listen, they will face disciplinary action.

Participant Naomi described how her experience with bullying makes her feels terrible and deals with it in the following way:

(1) She approaches the situation by intervening and making sure that justice is done.

(2) She encourages the kids to report the bullying as soon as it occurs.

(3) Students are told to tell their parents, teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators right away.

(4) She follows up with her students after the incident to make sure that the bullying has stopped.

(5) Students are made to be aware that bullying is not tolerated in the school.

Participant San also described his experience with school bullying by sharing, "From my experience with bullying, I know that bullying is destructive. I try to

encourage a warm and loving atmosphere in the school setting." From the analysis of the statements, all the data was reduced to the essential ideas or invariant elements of the experiences. I eliminated statements, which could not be reduced to the invariant components. Repetitive, vague, or overlapping data were deleted or presented in more descriptive terms.

Moustakas's Step 3: Grouping and Thematizing Basic Ideas

I clustered the common themes that were associated with the investigation by clustering horizons into themes and eliminating irrelevant data. The next step was to clustering the remaining information and identifying the themes. I converted the invariant constituents into themes relating to the participant's lived experiences with school bullying. Unrelated and inadequate data, not related to school bullying and bullying programs, were removed. Removal of such data was in line with Moustakas (1994) who stated that themes might be initiated in the data when repetitive responses are deleted. Moustakas (1994) proposed that appraising the data for unit meaning and horizons, that the researcher state and assemble the variant elements contained in the statements made by those participating in the study. The invariable patterns consistently resulted in the themes found in this investigation. Examination of the data revealed certain categories found in the exploration: (a) bullying conduct and anti-bully programs (b) activities or conduct regarded as bullying in the school, and (c) all-inclusive actions to alleviate aggressive conduct. The essential themes for the respective categories are clearly stated in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The responses to the interview questions led to the invariant constituents; this can be found in Appendix B.

Moustakas's Step 4: Creating Textual Descriptions

I identified the mutual patterns in the research. I finalized the themes through the following evaluative requirement for the ideas in that they needed to be: (a) articulated clearly and (b) well-matched to each other. Those that did not conform to the criteria were considered irrelevant to the research and were therefore eliminated. I recognized and acknowledged the concluding invariant constituents, with emphasis on defining themes central to the research questions. Further, I added an examination of the central ideas and constituents to accomplish the final determination of the research purpose.

Moustakas's Step 5: Developing an Organized Portrayal of the Data

I gathered the participant's textural thoughts of the central ideas. Under this step, I was able to record the experiences of the participants. I was able to understand their perceptions, moods, and the effects of their experiences. I clustered the common words and actions this revealed. The common words provided a representation of the account regarding detrimental bullying conduct as witnessed and reported by the participants. In addition, some of the findings gave rise to rich variant constituents and themes. The participants stated that the aggressive move, the more insulting the language of the bully, the more fear was instilled in the bullied, making them feel inadequate and incompetent.

Moustakas's Step 6: Creating Complex Operational Descriptions

I included the participants' operational descriptions, predicated on the specific rich, textural explanations they gave. I unified the textural and operational accounts to explore the issue of school bullying from the viewpoints of study participants, as envisioned for this study. In applying this step, I was able to recount the issue of school

bullying accurately. The account comprised the nature of school bullying as experienced by the participants through witnessing of the event or events. Further, the bullying deterrence program was explored, and the findings were revealed.

Moustakas's Step 7: Blending Denotations and Essences

Finally, I extended the complex description and textural accounts, creating composite images based on respondent personal textual and structural metaphors, allowing emerging themes to emerge. In analyzing the data, I made sure the themes were what the respondents specifically enumerated or stated. I assessed the theme to ensure that the essential experience narrated was a pertinent and acceptable component in the comprehension of the study problem. Vague themes were edited and subsequently were represented in an expressive method. After clustering and thematizing, the invariant constituents were gathered and categorized into thematic labels, which finally became the essential themes in answer to the study's research questions. Data investigation was steered inductively through coded components to bigger illustrations, via categories and themes. Through this method, codes, categories, and themes developed from the data and were placed in a hierarchy according to their significance to the study questions. Table 2 is a summary of codes developed through the data analysis process; moreover, the table also explains codes.

Table 3

Sample Code

Codes	Sentences
Low self-esteem	One of the causes of bullying is low self-esteem
Inability to communicate	Students that have an accent, not talking the right way are likely to be bullied
The home the person comes from	Children from home where they are aggression and fighting are prone to school bullying.
Problem-solving ability	One of the qualities a teacher should have in tackling bullying is problem-solving ability.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative research, the key factor is to develop meaning that is attached to the research questions (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). Consequently, I modified the method for data collection to the study questions to enhance and boost credibility as recommended by Rueger and Jenkins (2014). To safeguard the reliability of the exploration, I utilized the peer review, where another expert in the field helped with the evaluation of methods used in the study. I also used a transcript review to explore the meaning participants had concerning the problem under investigation and participants' perspective in the results. These procedures of confirmation added value and integrity to the results of this investigation.

Further, to attain consistency in this exploration, an investigator must prove that the investigation embodies trustworthiness, reliability, confirmability, and transferability (Patton, 2002). As noted by Denzin (2010), the interview procedure being conversational

in nature could create further questions and enquiries, which assist in comprehending the viewpoints of those participating in the study. Accordingly, I utilized a face-to-face interview protocol to guarantee reliability and allowed me to investigate more about the insights of the participants on school bullying, their experiences in the school environment, and the school deterrence program. I took the following steps to safeguard the trustworthiness of this investigation.

Trustworthiness

There are four kinds of triangulation that improve the trustworthiness of qualitative study (Denzin, 2006). These are: a) data triangulation which focuses on data from numerous sources, b) explorer triangulation, this allows for many investigators to gather and examine identical data from different standpoints, c) theory triangulation, as the name implies, allows utilizing numerous theories in interpreting research outcomes, and finally, d) methodological triangulation, which comprises utilizing several approaches to gathering data. In this study, I applied three categories of the triangulation, specifically: data, theory, and methodological. For data triangulation, I utilized interviews with 10 participants and conducted an appraisal of both current and past literature. Further, I employed theoretic triangulation by utilizing a theoretical perception to describe participants' experience of school bullying and the bullying deterrence program. Procedural triangulation entailed the use of a tape recorder, field notes, and taking down notes related to the data collections process as suggested by Merriam (2002).

Data verification. I recorded all the interviews, and the recording was transcribed to confirm accurateness. Further, I used peer briefing, which entailed an appraisal and

remarks on my work by my dissertation committee Chair and my second committee members, who are all experienced Ph.D. holders in the Department of Public Policy and Administration at Walden University. Peer Review helped to unearth and address any prejudices and substandard assumptions in the study (Sharkey et al. 2015). Further, I added textual descriptions of the data utilizing exact accounts of the participants in the study.

Transferability

Generalization of the research findings is not the central issue in a qualitative study as the data obtained in an investigation is aimed at benefiting some interest (Creswell, 2009; Noble & Smith, 2015). To enhance transferability, I used detailed, textual accounts and verbatim transcripts of the data gathered from the interview participants, which interested parties can use to decide the importance and the relevance of the investigation for their own use (Patton, 2002; Noble & Smith, 2015). I also detailed the opinions of the teachers and principals regarding school bullying in the school.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, I utilized a reflexive journal, before and during data collection, to avoid personal biases. Additionally, I recorded the interviews and transcribed it into my laptop. I listened to the interview audio and compared it with my field notes to ensure accuracy. For clarification, where there was ambiguity, I conducted a second interview for clarification to enable the participant to appraise the transcripts, and conducted peer debriefing for feedback with faculty members, frequently

recommended by Bradshaw (2015). Feedback from my research mentors was critical in correcting some of the assumptions I made in my interpretation of the data.

Confo6rmability

Conformability of studies relies on actuality, reliability, and dependability (Noble & Smith, 2015). I gained actuality in that participants offered their true opinions. Further, I established a review trail and did a transcript review to fortify trust in the materials gathered from the study as recommended by Noble and Smith (2015) and Patton (2002). The research accounted for the experiences of the participants in school bullying and recognized any individual preconceptions (Merriam, 2002).

Results

The study findings are highlighted in chronological order utilizing the research questions. As in a phenomenological study, the participants' perspectives and experiences with the research phenomena are presented together to make sense from their mutual responses and experiences (Yin, 2009). The themes supported the research questions and findings, and this agrees with Patton (2002) for conducting a fruitful phenomenological study, wherein he posited that for a valid phenomenological study, the theme must support the research questions and studying findings. According to Yin, a thorough analysis of phenomenological study data produces components that are reflective of the research questions (See Appendix B for the interview questions utilized in gathering data from the participants). I only utilized codes that reflected the research questions, which I categorized into themes/categories. The study findings are based on exhaustive interviews with participants utilizing face-to-face interviews, open-ended interview

questions, and appraisal of current and past literature on school bullying. The results are explored below in an analysis of the themes based on the research questions.

Main Research Question

How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying in a middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory? This research question was aimed at understanding how the social group that surrounds the students in the chosen middle school environment help in curtailing school bullying in the school environment and the effectiveness of the bullying deterrence program. The participants answered the interview questions by describing their experiences with school bullying and the impact of the bullying program on preventing bullying in the school. The main study question was supported through the sub-questions that were explored through in-depth interviews with 10 school personnel, made up of school teachers and principals.

RSQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

RSQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?

Five themes emerged from the analysis of Sub Research Question 1. These themes were based on contributors' insights and experiences of study participants on school bullying in the school environment. They included: (a) the causes of bullying, (b) bullying conduct can be learned, (c) the impact of bullying on teachers' experiences, (d) teachers need more professional training in school bullying, (e) the role of teachers in

preventing school bullying, and (f) the role of principals/ administration in curtailing school bullying.

Sub Research Question 1

How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

Theme 1: The Causes of Bullying

The participant, being knowledgeable in school bullying presented rich textual comments on the causes of bullying, and according to the participants, there are many causes of bullying. The findings indicate that communication, inability to communicate adequately, having accents, low self-esteem, the home environment, and peer influence are the principal causes of school bullying. Participant Gloria stated, "I think there are many causes of school bullying. The desire to get attention, without the confidence to get attention in a positive manner, the inability to communicate maturely in person, and low self-esteem." Participant JJ stated, "Bullying can be caused by the way a person looks, talks, and associates—by not wearing the appropriate clothes like the brand name clothes." Participant House highlighted, "Bullying can be caused by not wearing the right things that are in fashion, and that could make the student feel very low." Participant San, further stated, "Bullying could be caused by one's disabilities, accent, the way one dresses and talks. Home influence—people from home where the parents indulge in aggressive conduct are bound to bring such conduct to school." Participant Ruth stated:

> There are several reasons people bully others. Children mimic what they see at
>
> home from their parents or those who reside with them. Others bully due to

having low self-esteem, they put others down to make themselves feel superior. Still, there are those who bully to impress others or give in to peer pressure just to fit in.

Related to peer influence and low self-esteem, participant Jo stated, "My personal belief that one of the causes of bullying is low self-esteem. The bully wants to feel popular, so they try and pick on someone they feel is weak, it's peer influence." Tables 3 summarizes the main themes emerged in answers to question 1.

Table 4

Themes From Sub Research Question 1

Sub Research Question 1	Themes from Sub Question 1
How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?	The causes of bullying Bullying conduct that can be learned The impact of bullying on teachers' experiences. The role of teachers in preventing school bullying. Teachers need more professional training in school bullying. The role of principals/administrator in preventing bullying.

Theme 2: The Role of Teachers in Preventing School Bullying.

From the study's findings, teachers are part of the students' social circle and can mitigate bullying by maintaining a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom situation. Encouraging good behavior, being kind, and respectful to one another are ways teachers could help in curtailing bullying. According to San, "I believe that focusing on the positive behaviors, teaching students how to communicate with their peers, and focusing on respect is the best way to handle bullying." Faith stated, "We encourage a positive school environment by making students pay for the consequences of their actions." For Ruth, kindness and equality would contribute to a positive environment in school if the students are encouraged and taught to be kind and fair towards their peers." In responding to the question on the role of the teacher in curtailing bullying, almost all the participants gave the same answer, although some of them added more perspective to the question. For example, participant Jo stated further that teachers should teach the students more positive words that will help calm a volatile situation. Participant Jo voiced:

> I think that at the beginning of each day, students can be taught real words and phrases that can calm a volatile situation; they can also be taught pleasantries. For example, they can say good morning to each other; they can look at each other and say, "You are important to me."

Theme 3: The Impacts of Bullying on Teachers' Experiences

Bullying has a significant effect on teachers who have experienced it via witnessing and observation. Seeing the devastation, it has caused students has made

teachers have a broader outlook on the phenomenon. Through their experiences of the occurrences of bullying, they encourage a positive atmosphere in the class. Participant San stated, "From my experience in bullying, I know that bullying is destructive. I try to encourage a warm and beautiful atmosphere in the school environment." Jo reiterated further, "I know bullying is destructive. Right from the beginning of school year, I try to encourage positive behavior in class. Send those who indulged in bullying to the school counselor." The teachers should encourage good manners and make the students respect one another.

Furthermore, from their experience teachers try to engage the student in things that will keep them away from bullying behavior. They create programs in the classroom that will help in minimizing the incidence of bullying. Participant Naomi stated that:

Right at the start of the school year, I display a "Be a buddy, not a bully" bulletin on the walls in the class. The bulletin board itself is made up of maybe ten prompts such as "Don't be mean behind the screen," which the kids visit and discuss in small groups as they rotate throughout the room. Additionally, I have had all the students pair up with every other student where they interview each other one on one. Students are told, "this is our school family," so they need to work on getting along in addition to looking out for one another. They encourage the kids to report the occurrence of bullying immediately as it occurs.

Participant Jo pointed out,

From my experience with bullying, I encourage kids to report bullying as soon as possible is the key. I cannot stress this enough. Students are told to tell their

parents, teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators right away. I encourage more positive conduct in school.

Participant Gloria highlighted, "I use my experience in bullying in correcting the student in letting them know that there is zero tolerance for bullying in our school."

Theme 4: Teachers Need More Professional Training in School Bullying

From the research findings, the school has enough resources, but the teachers stated that they needed more training to handle bullying. Participant Jo stated, "We have enough resources in dealing with bullying, but we need more training in handling bullying." Participant House reiterated what participant Jo shared by stating:

We have enough resources on the district website and in the school. I think we need more training. When bullying does occur, I follow the district policy, make certain that our students are safe, and try to remain positive throughout.

Participant Ruth stated further, "I think we need more training to better handle bullying in school... I think we need more training." All the participants agreed that they needed more training on school bullying. According to them, every day, society is advancing in technology and students are not left out of this form of communication. They have developed other ways of bullying through various technologies such as cyberbullying. Student bullying occurs through computers, cell phones, twitter — Facebook etc. Teachers need more training to keep them informed on how to handle the various types of bullying as noted in the literature review. Accordingly, participant JJ summarized, "We need more training, each passing day as bullying keeps taking on

different dimensions. Students keep coming up with new ways of bullying fellow students."

Theme 5: Bullying, Conduct That Can Be Learned

All the participant agreed that bullying could be learned, which is in line with Bandara's social learning theory, the conceptual framework for this study. Participant Ruth stated, "Yes, bullying can be learned. There are times when victims become bullies themselves. The entertainment scene also has a great influence on society." Participant Naomi stated, "I believe it can be learned and strategies can be taught to modify the learned behavior." Participant Faith added, "Yes, bullying can be learned, especially where the bully is a popular guy in school. Everybody will want to be his friend." Participant JJ added, "Yes, bullying can be learned especially in the middle school where some children are just coming from the elementary school. According to JJ, bullying can be learned and unlearned depending on the child's upbringing."

Theme 6: The Role of Principals/Administration in Curtailing School Bullying

Findings indicate that principals promote positive behavioral interventions and supports. Participant San articulated that, "The principal maintains a conducive school environment by ensuring that bullying activities are curtailed to the barest minimum by implementing the school bullying policy." Over 80% of the participant agreed that the principals put more programs in place in order to curtail bullying activities. They have the morning assembly where students are told the consequences of bullying and the effects of making wrong decisions in bullying others. Participant Denny stated:

As a principal, I make sure I organize bullying awareness programs to sensitize

the student on the danger of school bullying. I encourage the student to speak out

when bullied. I tell them my office is open to them and that they should come in

and talk with me should they be experiencing a bullying experience in the school.

They also work with students to promote positive behavior. Participant Naomi

said this of the principal, "The principal helps promote a positive school environment by

executing the district school bullying policy in the school." According to the participants,

the principal goes on rounds at different intervals during the school day in the effort to

prevent school bullying. The principals make more rounds in areas where bullying

activities are more frequent in the school. A principal promotes a culture of learning that

does not tolerate bullying. Participant Faith specified, "The principal makes rounds

during the school hours, and this has also helped reduce the incidence of bullying in the

school." There are procedures put in place for students that are being bullied. They are

referred to the counselor, who put the machinery in motion towards punishing the bully.

During the code of conduct assembly, at the beginning of the year, it is made clear to

students that the school does not tolerate bullying. Further, the principals help in

preventing bullying by implementing anti-bullying programs intended to increase and

encourage a favorable school climate and eradicate bullying harassment and intimidation

in school.

Sub Research Question 2

How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the

social environment of the student in school?

Theme 7: The School Bullying Program

Findings from the participants indicate that the school does not have its own

bullying program. It uses the school district bullying program found on the school district

website. Participant JJ stated, "The school follows the school district policy on bullying

harassment." Participant Jo added, "The district has a Bullying and Harassment policy;

the school follows that policy and works with our students to support positive interactions

among peers." The school's website refers parents and guardians to the Anti-Bullying

website. Participant Gloria stated,

> We do not have a specific bullying program at our school. We go through teacher
>
> training on how to identify bullying and what to do in the scenario of bullying.
>
> We also have assemblies that teach the students about bullying and why it is
>
> wrong.

Participant Faith voiced, "The school does organize a bullying awareness

program, and teachers are encouraged to organize programs in the classroom to deter

bullying conduct." Participant San detailed, "The school organizes meetings, like the

morning coffee where parents are invited, and a resource person tells them about school

bullying and how to identify it." The school also organizes programs for teachers to

sensitize them to bullying at the beginning of each school year. Participant House

emphasized:

> At the beginning of every school year, teachers are made to view a training video
>
> on school bullying. It serves as a refresher course for teachers on how to handle a

bullying incident. We teachers must pay attention because at the end we take a

quiz, which we must pass.

Theme 8: The Effectiveness of the School Bullying Deterrence Program

 The school bullying programs are effective according to 70% of the participants,

while 30% of the participants held contrary views. All the participants came up with

recommendations, which will be discussed later. According to Participant Ruth, "To my

knowledge, the anti-bullying programs at my school are effective and have helped

reduced bullying activities." Participant JJ shared a similar view to participant Ruth and

stated, "I think the bullying program we have is effective, in that it has helped us in

dealing with bullying activities on the school campus." Participant Jo highlighted,

The bullying program in the school is effective. We have been getting good

results from it. For instance, when a child is bullied, he files a report, and the

incident is investigated. At the end of the day, if bullying is established, the action

is taken against the bully.

Participant Denny pointed out that, "I think the bullying program we have in the

school is quite effective. I do believe that we mitigate bullying issues quickly and limit

the amount of bullying by focusing on positive interventions and behavior." Participant

Care stated, "I think to a certain extent the bullying program works and is effective."

Participant Faith and Participant House held contrary views. According to participant

Faith, "I do not know how effective they are." Participant House echoed this by sharing:

I do not think the bullying program in the school is enough. We need a more

defined bullying program other than the one on the school district's website. I

think the programs we organize in school to deter bullying conduct could be more

effective.

Theme 9: The Anti-Bullying Program Recommended

The participants recommended a bullying program that incorporates mental

health. Participant Faith stated, "Programs that also incorporates mental health so that the

students will know how to deal with the disabled students and not bully them because of

their circumstances." Participant Jo highlighted, "A program such as this should be

incorporated in the school curriculum from K1-K12." The participants also recommended

a program that incorporates the family, which is in line with Bowes et al. (2010) and

Bandura (1987), they emphasized that the traditional function of the family must be

utilized in connection with the development of bully prevention and intervention

programs. Participant Gloria reaffirmed the significance of involving the family in a

school bullying program by stating:

> I will recommend a program that incorporates the family, as the family is the first
>
> environment of the student. A program that involves the parents, like inviting
>
> them to school for morning coffee, where parents learn about bullying, how to
>
> identify it should a child be involved; this could be an eye-opener to the parent."

Participant Denny pointed out:

> Activities like involving the parents more in the school bullying activities, [where
>
> parents] are told what bullying is, and how to know if their child is a victim or a
>
> bully themselves. [This includes] how to get help for the child will help the school
>
> in fighting bullying.

The participants also recommended a program that incorporates respect, kindness, and empathy. Davison and Stein (2014) recommended an increased focus on empathy in any programs that are utilized for diminishing bullying. Participant Faith wanted a bullying program that is all inclusive by pointing out, "A bullying program that is all-inclusive, that [should] also incorporated kindness, respect, and tolerance." Participant JJ posited, "A bullying program that is incorporated into the school curriculum should incorporate respect and kindness." Participant House stated, "A program that will have a far-reaching effect on the bully, [and a] program that will also include rehabilitation for both victim and bully [is needed]." Participant San stated, "A program that will involve a wide school outreach on bullying, A program that will sensitize the students more on the negative effects of bullying both in school and outside school [is warranted]." Some of the recommendations provided new knowledge to the existing literature such as incorporating mental health topics into the school curriculum and a program that incorporate rehabilitation for both the bullied and the bully, and other recommendations, with specific values that can be taught to students. Table 4 summarizes major themes emerged as a result of answers to research question 2.

Table 5

Themes From Sub Research Question 2

Sub Research Question 2	Main themes from Sub Research Question 2
How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?	1. The effectiveness of the school deterrence program. 2. 2. The anti-bullying program recommended.

Summary

In this Chapter, I presented the accounts of the 10 school personnel's lived experiences of bullying behavior in school. I gathered data through face-to-face interviews with the participants. I used interview questions that were framed from the research questions. I gathered my data from their responses. I utilized the phenomenological data analysis process using Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam seven steps data analysis strategy. First, I hand coded the data following Gibbs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard (2003) in the data analysis process. I then applied epoche before utilizing Moustakas modified Van Kaam seven steps, to avoid personal prejudice and biases, by using participants' responses and experiences in answering the interviewing questions. I then applied Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam seven steps in analyzing the data. In step 1, I listed and grouped the data. Every statement was given equal value through a process known as horizonalization. Through horizonalization, I was able to identify the variant constituent related to the phenomenon. In step 2, I reduced the data to the essential ideas. In step 3, the data were grouped and thematized

into basic concepts. Using step 4, I identified with the primary aspects surrounding the research. In step 5, I gathered the participant's textural imaginings of the central idea. In the 6th phase, I forwarded the participants' operational descriptions, predicated on the specific respondent textural explanation. In the final step, step 7, I extended the complex description and textural accounts, creating composite images based on respondent personal textual and structural metaphors.

Through using all the aforementioned processes, nine themes emerged:

1. The causes of bullying

2. Bullying is a behavior that can be learned

3. The role of teachers/counselors in preventing school bullying

4. Teachers need more professional training

5. Experiences of teachers in preventing bullying

6. The role of principals/ administration in curtailing school bullying

7. The school bullying program

8. The effectiveness of the school bullying deterrence program

9. The anti-bullying program recommended

In Chapter 5, I discuss the interpretation of the key findings, implications for positive social change and practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological exploration was to explore how teachers and principals at a U.S. middle school perceive the school's existing bullying programs and recommendations about how to improve the programs. The study also attempts to determine if there was a success in the school's bullying prevention program within the chosen school. I explored the phenomenon of social influences on the occurrence of bullying because this aligned with the problem and topic of the study. I explored the steps taken by the teachers and principals, who are members of the students' social circles, to prevent school bullying and assessed the effectiveness of the school's bullying programs. The 10 participants completed face-to-face interviews, which constituted the primary source of data. The primary data were supported by information from the extant literature on school bullying. I addressed one main question and two subquestions in this study. The research questions and sub research questions were, as follows:

RQ1. How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying at a middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory?

SRQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school?

SRQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?

First, I gathered data. Next, I employed hand coding following the process used by Gibbs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard (2003). I applied epoche before

utilizing Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam's seven steps to avoid personal

prejudice and biases. I used the participants' responses and experiences in answering the

interview questions. I then applied Moustakas's modified Van Kaam seven steps in

analyzing the data. In all, nine general themes developed from the data breakdown. The

nine main themes included: (a) the causes of bullyin; (b) bullying conduct can be learned;

(c) the role of teachers in averting school bullying; (d) the impact of the teachers'

experiences in preventing bullying; (e) the quality a teacher should have in curtailing

school bullying; (f) the role of principals/administration in curtailing school bullying, (g)

the school bullying program; (h) the effectiveness of the bullying deterrence program; (i)

the antibullying is program recommended.

This exploration is important because it advances the body of knowledge on

school bullying as it relates to the influential role of social circles (e.g., teachers and

principals/administrators) in the management of bullying in the middle school. The

knowledge that was generated in this research, if implemented, may help researchers

comprehend the trends and dynamics stemming from school bullying.

In addition, the findings may have practical implications by aiding policy makers

in generating policies on school bullying. The study yielded an in-depth analysis and

conjectural model for prospective future studies. The research findings may educate

community members, government officials and staff, educators, and others who deal with

the risk of bullying in schools. The exploration fills the gap in the literature by providing

empirical evidence on measures that may effectively reduce the phenomenon of school

bullying. The research outcome, if properly executed, could sustain social change by

lowering the rates of school dropouts, reducing the incidents of homicide and suicide resulting from school bullying, and decreasing other antisocial behaviors associated with school bullying.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I present a summary of the key findings and interpretations of the study in table 5 below.

Table 5

Main Themes From the Study

Research questions	Main themes
Main Research Question: How did social mechanisms influence the occurrence of bullying at a middle school in line with Bandura's social learning theory? SRQ1. How did the teachers and principals, as part of the social circle of students, contribute to the promotion or mitigation of bullying activities in school? SRQ2. How effective is the school's bullying deterrence program, which is part of the students' social environment within the school?	1. The causes of bullying. 2. . Bullying conduct that can be learned. 3. The role of teachers/counselors in preventing school bullying. 4. . Teachers need more professional training. 5. Experiences of teachers in preventing bullying. 6. The role of principals/administration in curtailing school bullying. 7. The school bullying program. 8. The effectiveness of the school bullying deterrence program. 9. The anti-bullying program recommended.

The Role of Teachers in Averting School Bullying

Teachers play a significant function in averting school bullying by encouraging a constructive learning atmosphere in school (Smith et al., 2010). According to Participant San, "I believe that focusing on positive behaviors, teaching students how to communicate with their peers, and focusing on respect is one of the best ways to handle bullying." The participants agreed that in order to curtail school bullying teachers must have the right attitude and the ability to problem solve. These findings are in line with Strohmeier and Noam (2012), who stated that the conduct of teachers is noteworthy in shaping how they will manage and prevent school bullying. According to the study participants, teachers must foster ethical behavior in order to enforce positive conduct among students. A teacher must be a role model to students (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). A teacher must also teach students the dangers and consequences of bullying. Findings from other studies show that sometimes teachers have a problem differentiating between aggressive conduct and a peer conflict (Strohmeier & Noam, 2012). However, this view runs contrary to the view of the participants in this study who were not only knowledgeable about school bullying, but who were able to identify the different bullying behaviors. Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, and Johnson (2004) supported this idea as they maintained that one of the primary roles of teachers is to identify bullying when it occurs. The teachers in this study were of the view that most middle school bullying conduct is

from the home environment, peer pressure, feelings of uncertainty, and low self-worth

(see Bandura, 1987; Swearer & Hymel 2015).

The Role of Principals/Administration in Curtailing School Bullying

Principals perform a substantial function in mitigating school bullying. They

ensure that school bullying is reduced by initiating programs that deter bullying conduct

in school. These actions are in line with Harris and Hathorn (2006), who were of the view

that schools should launch programs that will cut down on the rate of bullying incidents

in schools. The school in the study organizes programs that discourage bullying conduct

in the school. Morning assembly is one of the programs organized by the school, and

during this time, the students are made to understand that the school has zero tolerance

for bullying (Phillips & Cornell 2012). The school enforces and effects discipline and

makes sure that no child is left behind (Phillips &Cornell, 2012).

An effective principal should have the capability of communicating goals and be

able to exchange ideas with students and other members of the school. Principals who

have these abilities to communicate and create progressive action across the school

community will succeed in building a positive school environment (Phillips & Cornell

2012). Regrettably, previous research suggested that principals did not see bullying as

problematic in schools. However, the disciplinary records show the contrary is true (Flynt

& Morton, 2008; Newgent et al., 2009).

Furthermore, to safeguard the students from bullying conduct, the principal

should be more visible in places where bullying occurs most (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). In

the present study, the principals conduct rounds in such areas where bullying takes place

frequently, and this was said to be very helpful in minimizing bullying activities in the school. Additionally, the principals can work together with staff and faculty and advance suitable deterrence programs (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). However, this is not the position with the present school, the subject of this research, since the primary school deterrence program is from the school district. Nevertheless, the principals still organize programs that help eliminate school bullying, and on a regular basis, the principal instigates deterrence programs, which have been effective. The principal is the significant figure in the success of a deterrence program because principals set the pace in schools (NCES, 2010). In addition, bullying could turn out to be a legal responsibility for U.S. schools (NCES, 2010). Therefore, it is the duty of the school principal to know district regulations concerning school bullying and the state laws on school bullying (NCES, 2010)

The Effectiveness of the Bullying Deterrence Program

From the perspective of the participants, the school bullying programs are effective, and as a result, there has been a drop-in bullying activity in the present school. However, this contradicts the views of Bradshaw (2015) who claimed that most of these deterrence programs had not been proven nor had they been rigorously studied for their effectiveness. Bradshaw asserted that the available reviews are often biased as there is a social need to claim intervention, while the evidence of the increased occurrences should serve as ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of the programs instead. Nevertheless, the study findings of the effectiveness of the deterrence program further coincide with the findings of Barnett (2014), who explored the bullying program at the Holabird Academy

in Northeast Baltimore. According to Barnett (2014), the program has been highly successful, and the school has seen a dramatic drop in the suspension rate, as well as in reports of bullying on the school grounds.

The Anti-Bullying Program Recommended

The participants recommended a bullying program that incorporates respect, kindness, empathy, and tolerance. Nevertheless, some of these recommendations provide new knowledge to the literature, and these are specific values that can be taught to students. Some of these views are in line with Davison and Stein (2014) that recommended an increased focus on empathy in any programs that are utilized for diminishing bullying. Seaman (2012) claimed that it is in classroom teaching that the individual learns the common skills that are needed to interrelate with one another appropriately and the compassion required to support the victims of bullying. Davison and Stein (2014) and Seaman (2014) reiterated the importance of empathy in diminishing the incident of bullying. Kindness and equality will contribute to creating a peaceful atmosphere for the students, and this idea agrees with the existing literature.

Carter (2012) mentioned that parents should teach their students to be compassionate and understanding to prevent bullying incidents. At the same time, this study offers new data as there has been no study that identified how kindness and equality these would create a safe environment for school children. The attributes of kindness and respect and tolerant are helpful to school personnel in dealing with bullying and add new information to the literature.

The participants also recommended a program that involves the family at all levels. Bowes et al. (2010) emphasized that the traditional function of the family must be utilized in connection with the development of bully prevention and intervention programs. Moreover, the basis of a supportive family offers a fundamental foundation for the victims and often helps to end bullying situations long before the educators are made aware of the situations. Bradshaw (2014) claimed that one must not diminish the power of the family and the caregivers in relation to stabilizing the school environment. In other words, acceptable behavior, and the ability to confront and withstand negative actions begins with a positive setting and a strong foundation of communication at home.

The participants also recommended that mental health should be incorporated in school curriculum from K-12. Further, this provides new knowledge to the existing literature about the core concepts that should be included in anti-bullying programs in this school district and other school districts. Also, a program that will include rehabilitation for both victim and bully would be helpful. Programs such as these should be incorporated in the school curriculum for K-12. Creating more bullying awareness program agrees with the existing literature. Green (2007) and Seaman (2012) asserted that a conversation on bullying should be included in the school syllabus. Integrating bullying deterrence program into the school syllabus and the need to create more bullying awareness programs is in line with the decisions of Green (2007), who posited that schools should be willing to adjust their curriculum to include bullying interventions.

Moreover, Green also asserted that bullying intervention programs should begin at the early educational levels. Similarly, Seaman (2012) also argued that there should be

a basic curriculum for each subject that serves as an example of teaching empathy, understanding, and compassion. These values would lessen incidents of bullying, as students would study how to empathize and be sympathetic to other students.

Teachers Need More Professional Training

The teachers stated that although they have bullying resources that they are not professionally trained to handle bullying. Participant JJ stated, "We need more training, especially as students develop new ways of bullying." All that the participants stated about bullying agrees with the existing literature. Carter (2012) encouraged special training on school bullying for the teachers. Teachers are the first group of people who interact directly and frequently with the students. They are the first line of defense on the part of school authorities. Bradshaw (2015) supported Carter's (2012) assertion about educators needing extensive training on bullying.

Additionally, Srabstein (2013) recommended that the programs aimed at bullying prevention should include training programs for school personnel. Even though teachers may not have enough training in dealing with school bullying, Olweus (1993) identified the fact that teachers often cannot recognize bullying behavior. Findings indicate that teachers identify aggressive conduct as bullying but could not identify non -physical hostility such as a verbal attack and exclusion from a social group, as bullying (Bradshaw, 2015). These findings indicate the need for more stringent professional training for teachers concerning school bullying.

The Theoretical Propositions

A central finding by the participants in this study is that bullying can be learned both in the school environment through peer influence and from copying from other students tagged as tough kids. In addition, bullying can be learned at home through the actions of the parents, if they are engaged in aggressive conduct, or if a parent is not teaching children how to interact socially. These findings were in line with Bandura's (1989) social learning theory, which posits that children learn by seeing and imitating others' conduct and behavior. Bandura's concept agrees with the notion that some elements influence young persons' behavior. According to Bandura, (a) a child learns by imitation, (b) children acquire certain behavioral traits from their parents, (c) the influence of social factors on the child is due to the child yearning to be accepted in a social circle of their peers, and (d) teasing and mocking is exhibited by children who do not have a stable home (Bandura, 1989). Bandura's proposition is in line with the present study and the existing literature.

Wojciechowski (2014) urged parents to do everything in their power to maintain open communication with their children to mitigate bullying behavior. Wojciechowski (2014) further claimed that families have a significant duty to their children by teaching prevention and intervening in the occurrences of bullying. Similarly, Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) pointed out that the incident of bullying viewed within some cities can be attributed to the levels of community violence that are also present within these cities. Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) stated that the tendency for the children to act similarly should not be surprising, but instead should be considered as an alert to the community

environment of the city. Noting that the school environment reflects the community environment, Barnett (2014) called for a community change program to alter the way that the students view the resolving conflicts, acknowledging differences, and forming relationships.

Further, Bandura (1989) proposed that children who are exposed early in life to violent behavior might become violent in school. According to this theory, children model behavior to which they have been exposed, both positive and negative. Bandura referred to this process as encoding. Reinforcement, which can also be positive or negative, tends to strengthen tendencies for such behavior (Bandura, 1989; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Consequently, this theory explains how bullying is learned and manifested in schools. Utilizing Bandura's (1989) social learning concept as a framework for this exploration helped clarify and add credence to teachers' opinions and viewpoints regarding the behavior of students who are bullies or become bullies. The premise is that children are inclined to emulate what they have learned. Teachers need to thoroughly comprehend this aspect of human behavior to address bullying conduct in the schoolroom setting.

The findings in this study support Bandura (1989), who posited that people learn from other people through social interactions, observations, and experiences; this is also supported by the school teachers and principals' responses. The school personnel believes that bullying conduct in school can be learned by the students interacting with one each other in school. In addition, and still in line with Bundara, the participants also reiterated that bullying could be unlearned through creating a positive school environment,

encouraging love and kindness, and enforcing the bullying deterrence program. It can be

unlearned simply through maturation and seeing more positive interactions as well

(Bandura, 1989).

The accounts of 10 school personnel (teachers and principals/administrators) and

their experiences of bullying conduct in school were highlighted in Chapter 4. A

thorough examination of the participants' answers to the interview questions was

generated from the study's research questions. The teachers and principals believed that

bullying should be explained to the students so that they can understand what it is and the

consequences. The school provides resources for addressing bullying, but teachers must

undergo more training in handling school bullying cases, especially in handling cases

such as cyberbullying. The teachers and principals firmly believed that parents should be

involved in any anti-bullying programs in school for that program to be effective. The

two groups want a program that encourages kindness and respect. Moreover, the issue of

mental health should be incorporated into the curriculum.

Limitations of the Study

The exploration included some limitations. Foremost, the generalization and

transferability of the outcomes of the investigation were restricted to the teachers and

principals. Moreover, the research was also restricted to one school district. The

investigation is restricted by the responses of the teachers and principals. I presumed that

the participants were providing candid and precise answers; however, I do not have any

way of knowing whether the responses were accurate or slightly embellished. I also used

purposeful sampling, which can limit the reliability of the findings. Purposeful sampling

was utilized because the present investigation only utilized one school and sought the

participants' experiences' in answering the study's questions. The sampling method was

also the easiest way to recruit participants.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study used purposeful sampling to recruit and gather the participants.

Future studies could use random sampling instead of purposeful sampling. Random

sampling improves the reliability of the outcomes in a qualitative exploration. A

qualitative method was utilized in this investigation. Future studies could implement a

quantitative methodology, using a bigger sample size to improve the transferability of the

findings. A quantitative approach can also provide generalizations about bullying

deterrence programs.

The current study focused on the experiences of teachers and principals and their

role in preventing school bullying. Future research should incorporate the role of

bystanders in school bullying prevention. Schultz (2012) noted that the bully requires

some form of an audience from which he or she can pull their power. Schultz (2012)

claimed that through this need, bullies give the bystanders a very active role in the

victimization of the recipient of the attack. Without the bystanders, the bully would have

no power to exhibit. Bystanders continue to allow the bully to use them out of fear of

becoming the next victim through retaliation. Bystanders serve as a bully to the victim as

they marginalize the individual and continue to allow the victim to feel as if they are

entirely isolated from the crowd (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigottn, 2012). While bystanders

may perceive themselves to be innocent in the entire bullying process, by continuing to promote this sense of isolation, they become a part of the bullying problem by being a bully/bystander. These bystanders often continue to offer encouragement to bullies out of fear of retribution and becoming a victim of bullying themselves; but the fact remains that the entire cycle would end if there were no audience or bystanders to participate (Barhight et al., 2013; Polanin et al., 2012). The role of the bystander is significant in preventing school bullying, and future studies should incorporate the role of the bystander in preventing bullying.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy Making

The results of this investigation agree with Bandura's social learning concept. The teachers and principals perceived that bullying behavior could be learned. Moreover, anti-bullying programs should focus on kindness, equality, respect, and compassion that could help bullies develop positive behavior and reduce bullying incidents. The research helped in generating additional information to enhance the existing data on bullying from the perspectives of the schoolteachers and principal/administrators. The results provided knowledge that could help scholars comprehend the trends and dynamics arising from school bullying. It provided empirical evidence on measures that could effectively reduce bullying incidents in schools. Teachers, counselors, and principals in various schools can utilize the results of this research to create programs that will be useful in combating school bullying.

Teachers should undergo extensive training, as they are the group who frequently and directly interacts with the students. They should be able to know how to handle

different bullying incidents. Teachers and principals/administrators should collaborate and improve communication between one another to be able to recommend policies and procedures that will have a practical impact on the utilization of anti-bullying policies in schools. They should also explore and incorporate the views of students in ways to address bullying among students. Parents and the family also have a part to play in a bullying deterrence program. The development of kind behavior in students starts at home. Parents should listen more to their children and be more active in anti-bullying programs. Policy makers may utilize the results of this investigation to generate policies on school bullying. The knowledge from this study can help the community, government, instructors, and authorities to successfully deal with the threat of aggressive conduct in schools.

Implications

Evidence indicates that bullies will disengage from their victims if the victims confront them. Strengthening programs to help children improve their self-esteem can help to curtail the problem of bullying. As the parents of children who were bullied in school because of their accent when we first arrived in this country as new immigrants, I had to set aside my personal beliefs and feelings about bullying to present the views of the school personnel who participated in this study. I did not let my emotions and experience affect this work; hence, I gathered and interpreted the information based on the opinions of the participants. I explored how the school personnel, who form part of the students' social circle in school, can provide a safer environment, and contribute to existing bullying programs. The results of this study, if implemented, can uphold societal

change by reducing the rates of school dropouts, reducing the incidents of homicide and suicide as a result of school bullying, and decrease other anti-social behaviors associated with school bullying (CDC, 2016). The results might be beneficial for the growth of more effective deterrence programs to minimize cases of school bullying. Finally, the study is relevant on a theoretical basis; it can incorporate the theories of bullying to design an optimal intervention for curbing its growing presence in America schools.

Conclusion

This phenomenological qualitative study intended to determine the perceptions of individuals associated with students at a chosen middle school, their experiences of bullying, and the success of the school's bullying prevention program in deterring bullying within the chosen school from the perspectives of 10 participants. I examined the lived experiences of the two social groups that deal directly with the students in the social learning school environment and the group experiences with bullying and the anti-bullying programs. According to the social learning concept, aggressive behavior is a creation of learned behaviors and observation (Bandura, 1989). The concept posits that children acquire aggressive behavior through imitation and that they are exposed to such contrary conduct through violent media content or peer influence. According to this theory, children model behavior to which they have been exposed, both positive and negative. Given the theoretical framework, it was expected that once these children have been reoriented to positive behavior, then they will reduce bullying behavior.

The 10 participating school personnel answered the interview questions: 6 teachers, 4 Principals/administrators. Data were gathered for analysis. Initially, I hand

coded the data following Gibbs and Taylor (2005) and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) data analysis process. I then applied epoche before utilizing Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam seven steps to avoid personal prejudice and bias. I applied Moustakas modified Van Kaam seven steps in analyzing the study data. Based on the data analysis, nine themes were generated and analyzed. From the emerging themes, low self-esteem, peer influence, and family influences were some of the factors identified as the causes of bullying. According to the study participants, teachers help in preventing bullying by maintaining a positive learning atmosphere and having problem-solving abilities. It was found that school principals could avert bullying in school by initiating programs to deter bullying behavior.

The results revealed that the school did not have a bullying program but depended on the bullying program used by the school district. Most of the participants stated that the school bullying program was effective, although some of the participants did not agree with that position. The teachers recommended different types of bullying deterrence programs, primarily incorporating empathy, kindness, politeness, mental health, rehabilitation, and the family into the school bullying curriculum from K-12 grades. Future studies should incorporate the role of the bystander, as they play a significant role in the school bullying environment. Most of the participants also stated that they needed more training to curb the menace of school bullying. The current investigation fills the gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on the measures that will effectively reduce the threat of school bullying.

In this chapter, I offered a precise investigation, an analysis of the results, the limitations of the exploration, the consequences of the findings, positive social change implications, and recommendations for future exploration. Further, this research adds to the field of knowledge concerning the role of the school personnel in bullying management and preventions. Conclusively, this study offers school administrators and legislators a broader viewpoint on school bullying and intervention programs that will help in reducing school harassment. It could provide a basis from which school policymakers and legislators can combine their efforts in maintaining a safe school environment if the recommendations are implemented.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are some of your beliefs pertaining to what causes bullying?

2. Do you believe that bullying is something that can be learned and unlearned?

3. What school district guidelines exist on school bullying?

4. What kind of bullying programs does the school have?

5. How effective are these anti- bullying programs within the school environment?

6. What would you like to do in class that could teach the importance of honoring each other?

7. Are you provided with the appropriate tools to deal with bullying when you see it?

8. How can your experiences with bullying influence how to go about addressing this issue?

9. How do your beliefs about kindness and equality influence what you think would contribute to creating a safe environment for students?

10. How does your perception/s about yourself influence how you approach bullying?

11. How is the manner in which bullying occurs in your school dealt with?

12. Would certain activities help shift the way bullying is treated in your school?

13. What skill or ability do you think as an instructor you need to successfully intervene in a bullying incident?

14. What do you think is the best way to curtail bullying?