

Impact of PeaceBuilders Violence Prevention Approach on Self-Reported Bullying Perpetration with Elementary School-Age Girls

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Bullying happens often among children and youth in the United States and has been the subject of many recent news stories. Rates of bullying vary substantially across countries, with total rates ranging from 9% to 54% of youth. While boys still appear twice as likely to be bullies than girls, the gap appears to have narrowed in recent years and a significant amount of popular news has been given to the subject. It has been reported that the significant gender differences at the primary school level disappear at the high school level, leaving boys' and girls' levels of bullying about the same. The differences in bullying found by researchers may be a function of the type of bullying studied and the assessment methods used.

Bullying has public-health consequences far beyond schoolyard squabbles. Being a bully, victim, or bully/victim is associated with elevated risk for a variety of adverse outcomes with public-health or public-safety consequences: depression, hyperactivity or future aggression, psycho-somatic complaints, increases in tobacco, alcohol and drug use, weapons carrying, and persistent antisocial behaviors. While bullying or victimization may not immediately cause diagnosable symptoms, such symptoms do appear to emerge over time. Utilization of mental-health and physical health resources are common consequences of peer victimizations. One of the most extreme and serious—but rare—consequences of perceived persistent bullying victimization is commission of mass murder by adolescents. Many of the adolescents who killed three or more victims at the same time had histories of persistent bullying.

Just as violence in girls has received increased attention, so has bullying in girls. However, articles on bullying address bullying in girls in their discussions of gender differences, not as an object of exploration in its own right. To date, there are few studies that focus on girls' bullying and those that do focus on victimization. Recent research suggests that male and female bullies and victims share some similar characteristics and this is true both for in-school and out-of-school behavior.

Some violence prevention programs, not explicitly designed to prevent bullying, might be predicted to reduce peer bullying perpetration or victimization as well as other violence. PeaceBuilders is one such theory-driven, evidence-based strategy. PeaceBuilders creates an environment where people of all ages and backgrounds see, hear, feel, and do actions

that increase peace and decrease problematic behavior. PeaceBuilders uses small evidence-based practices to reinforce these actions. The strategy creates a common language of collaboration, peace and reinforcement of peaceful behaviors by peers and adults. PeaceBuilders also reduces many antecedents that occasion bullying or victimization.

The published baseline and outcome data from the randomized-control study of PeaceBuilders suggest that the prevention strategy might be effective in reducing bullying. First, objective measures of somatic complaints and fighting injuries showed reductions in the controlled study using official nurses' office records, and this was the first school-based prevention study to show actual reductions in violent injuries. This finding is of particular practical and theoretical interest, because this is a real-world measure of real victimization that does have health and legal consequences. Second, teacher and student self-reports show reductions in aggressive behaviors and increased social-competence behaviors that predict protection against bullying as well as criminal behavior in later life. Finally, the prevention strategy had differentially positive effects on the most at risk children, who were most likely to commit acts of bullying, aggression and violence, which suggests that there might be fewer teacher and self-reports of bullying. The present paper tests what effects PeaceBuilders might have on child reported bullying perpetration among a population of diverse elementary school female children.

Eight elementary schools (Grades K–5), from two school districts in Pima County, Arizona, were chosen based on two criteria: 1) police crime maps; these maps identified areas with high levels of violent crimes and high neighborhood stress (e.g., domestic violence, transition and mobility, poverty levels); and 2) school histories of behavior problems including expulsions and suspensions. One of the eight schools consisted of a pair of schools in the same neighborhood, a school for Grades K–2 and a school for Grades 3–5 (approximately 1 block apart), and was treated as a single school for pairing, intervention, analysis, and discussion (School 2A). All of the other schools were self-contained Grades K–5 schools. A complete description of the sample and data collection procedures can be found elsewhere in papers posted on this web site.

<http://www.peacebuilders.com/pdfs/research/InitialBehaviorOutcomes.pdf>

Children completed a survey that included measures of pro-social behaviors, aggressive behaviors, Peace Builders behaviors, and measures of parenting. Based on an examination the items, the study identified a set of seven, which measured bullying or bullying behaviors. These included “I teased other kids at school,” “I pushed or shoved other students,” “I tried to get other students to fight,” “I pushed or shoved other students,” “I called other people bad names,” “I said I would hurt or hit someone,” and “I got sent to the school office for getting into trouble. Questions asked children to think back over the past two weeks and to assess to what extent these statements were true; they were rated as 1 = no, 2 = a little, and 3 = a lot. Bullying behavior scale scores were computed by averaging the responses to all seven items. Reliability estimates provided strong evidence that the items were internally consistent ($\alpha > .85$). Consistent with a

previous study on these data that focused on changes in social competence, pro-social behaviors, and aggression, the main analytic approach in the current study employed general linear modeling (GLM).

Prior to PeaceBuilders, between 75.1% to 91.5% of the students report no engagement in any of the bullying perpetrator construct items; and 3.4% to 9.6% reported engaging in the behaviors “A lot”. Girls reported significantly less bullying perpetration than boys after PeaceBuilders even though it was higher than boys prior to PeaceBuilders.

Estimates

Measure: bully

Sex of Child	time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	1	1.301	.016	1.270	1.332
	2	1.228	.016	1.198	1.259
Male	1	1.273	.017	1.241	1.305
	2	1.378	.016	1.346	1.409

Pairwise Comparisons

Measure: bully

Sex of Child	(I) time	(J) time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	1	1					
		2	.073*	.023	.001	.028	.117
	2	1	-.073*	.023	.001	-.117	-.028
		2					
Male	1	1					
		2	-.104*	.023	.000	-.150	-.059
	2	1	.104*	.023	.000	.059	.150
		2					

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .050 level.

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

This study employed secondary data analysis to examine the impact on elementary school-aged girls of a specific set of behavior outcomes related to bullying perpetration by PeaceBuilders, a universal school-based preventive intervention program focused on reducing aggressive behavior and increasing social competence. The original outcome studies showed clear evidence of actual reduced victimization, using nurse’s office records, increased social competence and decreased aggression, and differential positive effects for the most high-risk children. The present paper found that girls self-reported less bullying perpetration following the intervention. The findings of this paper underscore developmental, theoretical and practical challenges in efforts to prevent bullying behavior as well as broader antisocial behaviors.

Epidemiological studies clearly suggest that gender and cultural differences exist in bullying, and the present study appears to be one of several to report differential prevention effects on self-reported bullying by gender. What might account for the

difference in finding by gender? Several hypothesized reasons based on how PeaceBuilders was implemented at the sites and its construct may provide some explanation. PeaceBuilders is rich in language of relationships besides being a school-wide differential reinforcement of other behavior.

Developmentally, girls during the intermediate years tend to be more socially competent, and the relational framing of PeaceBuilders might be more likely to succeed with girls than boys. Furthermore, the nature of the PeaceBuilders may be more synergistic with girls' style of bullying, than with boys'. That is, the routines, rituals, and practices are designed to produce differential recognition and reinforcement of peaceful behavior and cognitions from peers and people of different ages and influence. Thus, PeaceBuilders focuses on increasing personal and collective agency for resiliency and positive behaviors, not on identifying and ferreting out aggression (i.e., physical).

The gender differences in the size and function of social networks also may help to explain why PeaceBuilders was more effective with girls than with boys. Girls' social networks tend to be small, used as a vehicle for isolating other girls and spreading rumors about them. Boys, on the other hand, run in larger, more amorphous social networks that do not serve as sites for reflective discussion about others.

To date, no study has combined all four domains of measures in a study of the prevention of violence or bullying: 1) hard archival data on victimization such as nurse's office visits, 2) teacher reports using psychometrically valid measures for violence and bullying, 3) valid student self-report for bullying and victimization, and 4) high-quality direct observation of victimization and bullying. Such an effort is much needed, especially paying attention to the issues of differential effects by gender, ethnicity and age. Until all four domains are well sampled, plus their ecological contexts, there remains meager support for programs that target only on bullying. What is also missing is the integration of multi-problem theory in the design and evaluation of universal prevention efforts. In theory, a well-designed universal prevention effort ought to be able to have multiple preventative outcomes: violence prevention, bullying prevention, substance abuse prevention, tobacco prevention, etc. The present study plus the prior publications suggest that an effective violence prevention and bullying prevention program could be achieved. That said, the effort requires a much broader array of data-collection tools and strategies that has been deployed in either violence or bullying prevention to date.

The present paper and project did not begin with "bullyproofing" in mind, since the concept emerged out of European research and violence prevention per se was North American. Bullyproofing is an elusive concept to measure, though a powerful "sound bite." A limitation of the present study is reflected in the rather limited methods and measures used in the original evaluation of PeaceBuilders. Future research on the effectiveness of PeaceBuilders would include the addition of observational methods and measures, studying a variety of school contexts such as playgrounds, lunchrooms, and transitions between classes and activities, and a more extensive analysis of other contexts such as the home, neighborhood, and community surrounding the school. Knowledge about teachers' reluctance to talk about bullying and about victims of bullying, as well as

students' lack of awareness of teachers' knowledge of bullying behaviors in school, might be used to create a new strategy that helps to break down the barriers to more frank discussion of the subject. Parental attitudes and beliefs about the use of violence to solve conflict and intra-familial violence and abuse might be included for an ecological perspective in understanding this serious individual, family, and community health and mental health problem.