KNOWLEDGE FOR HEALTH RESEARCH
Literature Review

Introduction:

Bullying is an issue of growing concern to parents, teachers, and social workers in New Zealand. Bullying affects a substantial number of children and youth in all schools, and it is not a new phenomenon, as it has been described in fictional works for centuries (MacDougall, 1993). Bullying occurs in all schools, but its relevance to health and well being is uncertain (MacDougall, 1993). It can be considered a common and normal developmental experience; alternatively it can also be considered an important cause of stress and of physical and emotional problems (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is a term that describes a wide range of unacceptable behaviours. A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, regularly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons (Olweus, 1993).

The two research articles I have chosen for this literature review are drawn from multiple methods which I think compliment each other and bring different strengths and challenges to my findings. The third article is an editorial piece from a Canadian newspaper which relates to the same theme - Bullying.

In this essay I will explore the articles from both a naturalistic and experimental-type inquiry. Then I will examine the rationale that led to the author's approach, and look at the theoretical perspective and philosophical assumptions that underlies both research

articles. Next, I will also comment on cultural issues and ethical considerations in my review. I will refer to the following journal items as: *Article One* - "Does bullying cause emotional problems? A prospective study of young teenagers"(Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, and Patton 2001); *Article Two* - "A Qualitative Study of Bullying from Multiple Perspectives" (Mishna, 2003); and, *Article Three* - "Bullies push their victims to suicide" (The Globe and Mail, 2000).

Article One is an Australian based study which was conducted by a team of researchers from two different hospitals, who were working collectively to examine whether bullying was the cause of emotional problems in young teenagers. The setting was in several Secondary schools in Victoria, Australia. Article Two is a Canadian based study, which was researched by one person using methods to investigate bullying from many perspectives including the victimized children, to their parents, to educators. Children in Grades 4 and 5 were part of the study.   Article Three talks about the cases of two British Columbia 14 year olds, who commit suicide, as a result of continuous bullying at school.

The definition of bullying include the imbalance of power; the repetitive nature of the act; the intention of harm; and the lack of justification for the act.   These are often interrelated and include:

- Physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, tripping, punching, stealing or damaging belongings (Olweus, 1993);

- Verbal bullying, including name calling, insulting, teasing, threatening, sexual harassment, racist remarks (Olweus, 1993); and

- Psychological bullying, including spreading rumours, dirty looks, stalking, isolating someone by preventing others from befriending them (Olweus, 1993).

The above is the common theme which is found in Articles One, Two, and Three, and very similar to other literature on bullying.

My particular interest in exploring bullying was raised from reading various newspaper articles on children who have committed suicide because they have been the victim of bullying in their schools. I was saddened by these stories and it had prompted my motivation to increase my knowledge about the nature, the extent and consequences of bullying. Furthermore, my 11 year old nephew was a victim of bullying in his school and it hurt me to see how much this had affected him emotionally.

Article One: *Does bullying cause emotional problems? A prospective study of young teenagers*

Purpose

The purpose for this research was to determine the relation between continuing peer victimisation and the onset of self reported signs of anxiety or depression in the early teen years. What is already known on this topic is that bullying is a common experience for many young people. Victimisation is related to depressions and, to a lesser extent, anxiety, loneliness and general self esteem (Carrol-Lind and Maxwell, 1997). The search aims to describe the onset of anxiety or depression, especially in adolescent girls, and will

explain that previous recurrent emotional problems are not related to future victimisation. The search also looks at how reduction in bullying in schools could have a substantial impact on the emotional wellbeing of young people.

Theoretical Perspective

The researcher conducted an experimental type research which was drawn primarily from deductive reasoning. This type of reasoning involves moving from a general principle to understanding a specific case (DePoy and Gitlin, 1998). From the perspective of the Positivists they try to build knowledge of a reality that exists beyond the human mind. They believe that human experience of the world reflects an objective, independent reality that this reality provides the foundation for human knowledge (Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2001). Positivists also tend to use laboratory experiments and field experiments, and surveys as their preferred research methods (Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2001).

Philosophical Foundations

Article One is based on the quantitative approach and tries to be objective. These are the most commonly used tools to study bullying behaviour (O'Moore, 2004). They provide an indicator of the prevalence and nature of bullying in the shortest possible time. They are particularly helpful for schools if they need to focus on a group of pupils, i.e., a class or year group that are a cause of concern (O'Moore, 2004). Another major belief of

logical positivism is that objective investigation and analysis are possible; that is the investigator, through the use of accepted and standard research techniques, can eliminate bias and achieve results through objective, quantitative measurement (DePoy and Gitlin, 1998).

Relationship between Writer and Subject Matter:

The research involved collaboration work from various directors from two centres: 1) Centre for Adolescent health, Royal Children's Hospital; and 2) Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics Unit, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and University of Melbourne

Ethical Considerations:

For this research ethics approval was granted by the Royal Children's Hospital ethics in human research committee, the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, and the Catholic Education office. Student participation was voluntary, with written parental consent required (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, and Patton 2001).

Article Two: *A Qualitative study of Bullying from Multiple Perspectives*

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact on children of peer victimisation. While considerable research has studied children who bully, there is little research on

victims' experiences (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). The search aims to describe the impact of victimisation from the perspectives of children, their teachers and parents, and to explain interpersonal processes that protect a child or place a child at risk for continuing victimisation. This pilot study informed a larger Canadian federally funded study currently underway.

Theoretical Perspective

The research process in Article Two was developed from inductive forms of reasoning. This kind of inquiry comes from the belief that individuals create their own subjective realities (Silverman, 2001), which also engage in humanistic and holistic epistemology (or understanding where knowledge comes from) (DePoy and Gitlin, 1998).   From the point of view of interpretivists, reality can be viewed as a process of social constructions. One way of describing research methodology within the interpretative paradigm is to say that "*it is the systematic collection and analysis of stories people tell about how they interpret reality*." (Ferguson and Ferguson, 1995). Telling stories is not enough; they have to be firmly embedded in thick description (Geertz, 1975) and in the more explicit discussion of the interpretivist theoretical assumptions. Because of the paradigm's firm belief in multiple realities of social construction, the goal of interpretivists is to describe, interpret and understand.

Philosophical Foundations:

The article is based on qualitative research. Various naturalistic approaches were evident in this research. A phenomenological approach was used to understand the experiences of students. It is a shared belief that the person has a world or identity (i.e. culture, relationships. Languages) by virtue of the culture they are born into, and can be understood only in the context of that world (DePoy and Gitlin, 1998). The qualitative methods that have been employed in Article Two are mainly: Semi structured interviews, observation and Narrative stories. Researchers used semi structured interview techniques used to obtain feedback from the children. It offers the interviewer the opportunity to explore bullying, and allows the interviewee to express their opinions, concerns and feelings. The fact that it is semi-structured allows the conversation to flow where it needs to in order to deal with issues as opposed to cutting someone off because they stray from the topic. The researchers also tape-recorded and transcribed one to one and a half hour long interviews with these children.

An ethnographical approach is another research process of learning about people, by learning from them. Ethnography literally means a description of peoples or cultures (DePoy and Gitlin, 1998).

Relationship between Writer and Subject Matter:

Faye Mishna (author of this research) is an associate professor, in the Faculty of Social Work, at University of Toronto. She has done extensive work in research of bullying in behaviours of both the bully and the victims, and the educators.

Ethical considerations:

Children and adolescents are vulnerable population and need to be protected from exploitation, especially when research is conducted. Ethical practice often requires researchers to obtain informed consent for children. In this article a research assistant reviewed the study with students during class time. Also to obtain parental approval for children to complete the survey, a consent form was sent home. Of 105 students invited to participate, 61 (58 percent) received parental consent.

Cultural issues:

Student behavior is influenced by the ethics of a school culture. "School culture" refers to the social system in a school building, including goals, identity, and customs. After "everybody knows how things are done in school," the school culture has a behavior plan. A culture's plan is rarely evaluated to see if to see if the plan allows, encourages or prevents bullying (Geertz, 2003).

School cultures do not often develop with altruistic planning; "bad things happen" and are tolerated (accepted / normed in) or "good things happen" which increase tolerance and respect. School culture is shaped by agreement on how behaviors are to be

interpreted and valued (or devalued) (Geertz, 2003). A few intimidating individuals can dominate those agreements and make the discussion of an idea in class a nerdy thing to do. Then bullying has hurt the instructional process without a disruptive incident! Smiles and laughter can write bullying into a behavior plan. Culture is the context which gives behavior meaning.

Summary:

I have found with the quantitative study of Article One that the most reliable method for assessing levels of bullying in the schools was to use questionnaire surveys. The survey can help to identify classes or year groups where levels of bullying are high and enable evaluation of the effectiveness of whole school policies and strategies to tackle bullying. The strengths of this study were the relatively large sample sizes. Of the sample of 3623 students, 2680 (79%) students participated in a least one wave of data collection which is satisfactory for a study of this type (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, and Patton 2001).

The qualitative study in Article Two draws together research findings about children's experiences of bullying. It is important for the educators and the parents to try to understand children's experiences in order to provide appropriate help. This study revealed that, although children's experiences are all very different, there are many common themes that arise when they talk about their experiences, feelings, coping strategies and what would help make things better. From these studies I found that parents understanding and perception of bullying were totally different from a child's perception of bullying. The pattern that emerged from the study was how difficult it is to

define bullying. Identifying an incident as bullying can be complex and confusing for children, parents, and teachers.

Conclusion:

Qualitative data complements quantitative data and privileges individuals' live experience. Increasing our understanding of the views of children and adults is key to developing effective interventions. I believe it is vital to have children's perspectives when trying to identify the processes involve in problematic peer relationships. My only recommendation, if not already practiced, would be that those who are conducting qualitative interviews with children, should be trained in child and adolescent development and be familiar with the ways that children at different ages understand and use language.

From an undergraduate's perspective, critically researching an issue is important as future practitioner because it involves continual seeking of knowledge - continual asking of questions - and continual learning of how diverse circumstances require diverse methods to bring about key interventions and solutions. I have also gained an appreciation for psychological research as this will enhance my understanding of the research-based information presented in my psychology classes and in everyday life.

Word Count: 2150

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