

## Article Fifty

# Help for the Bully/Peer Abuse Problem: Is Bully Busters In-Service Training Effective?

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Rachel Scott's life ended unexpectedly at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, when 2 of her peers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, shot 12 high school classmates and 1 teacher to death (Nimmo & Scott, 2000). In Meridian, Connecticut, a 12-year-old "hanged himself in his closet with a necktie after being picked on for months at school over his bad breath and body odor" (Scarponi, 2003). Today's troubled children kill adults, youth, and other children—and they also kill themselves in an attempt to soothe the pain of their social maladjustment (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997; Nimmo & Scott, 2000; Ritter, 1990).

Aggression by children against their peers is a growing concern among parents and educators. Past research has indicated that children who have poor attachment histories and poor social competence, and who blame themselves for their victim status are at risk for long-term victimization (Browning, Cohen, & Warman-Martin, 2003; Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Perry, Hodges, & Egan, 2001). Additionally, children who experience peer harassment have low self-regard (Egan & Perry, 1998), are at risk for faulty social self-perceptions (Egan & Perry, 1998; Graham & Juvonen, 1998), and typically undergo repetitive aggressive acts performed against them (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Recent research on the nature of children's friendships suggested that friendship plays a major protective role for children at risk for continued victimization (Browning et al., 2003). Similarly, Kochenderfer-Ladd and Ladd (2001) found that coping strategies employed by a peer-victimized child might moderate the extent of subsequent maladjustment.

A leading researcher in the area of bully prevention, Dan Olweus (1993), reported that, ideally, bullying behavior should be addressed schoolwide in order to effectively curb the negative and long-term effects of peer abuse. The primary role of the school counselor is the emotional well-being of students. Recent research has suggested that another individual closely linked to the positive effect of a school-based intervention is a child's teacher (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). For this reason, it is important to assess a

teacher's knowledge and use of skills to prevent bullying behaviors among one's peers (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000). The study described in this article addressed the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of a counselor/teacher-led classroom intervention for students called Bully Busters.

The research sought to extend Browning et al.'s (2003) research, and determine whether a Bully Busters teacher in-service training program will increase a counselor and/or teacher's awareness of the bully/victim problem in the classroom. Further, the research assessed the increase in a teacher's acquired knowledge of intervention strategies by measuring a teacher's ability to differentiate between childhood play and bullying, between types of bullying behavior (e.g., aggressive, passive, relational) and victim behavior (e.g., passive, provocative, bystander), and subsequent effective intervention use, as measured by the Teacher's Inventory of Skills and Knowledge – Elementary (TISK-E).

## Method

### *Participants*

Of the 36 trained personnel at a rural elementary school in East Tennessee (i.e., principal, assistant principal, special education teachers, traditional classroom teachers, and special support personnel that included a librarian, guidance counselor, and music, art, and physical education teachers) 99% were White, and 1% African American. Ages ranged from 24 to 59. From these 36 individuals, half ( $n = 18$ ) were randomly assigned to the treatment group (i.e., those receiving Bully Busters training), and half ( $n = 18$ ) were randomly assigned to the control group (i.e., those not receiving Bully Busters training) using the last four digits of their Social Security numbers. Of the participants who began the study, all 36 participants completed training and were present for both the pretest and posttest data collection. Two treatment participants dropped out of the study for personal reasons prior to delayed posttest data collection.

### *Instrumentation*

The TISK-E (i.e., dependent measure), was specifically developed by Horne, Bartolomucci, and Newman-Carlson (2003) to measure Bully Buster program effectiveness. Questions on the TISK-E are grouped according to subjects related to properly identifying bullying behavior, interventions for bullies, interventions for victims, and interventions for bystander victims. Additionally, the TISK-E instrument assesses knowledge of these particular subject areas, as well as skill acquisition of interventions to address bullying behaviors and the physical, emotional, and/or psychological needs of those involved in peer-aggressive interactions (i.e., bullies, victims, and bystander victims).

### *Treatment*

*Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders, Grades K-5* (Horne et al., 2003) teacher in-service (i.e., the independent variable) was presented to the treatment group, and was delivered in three sessions that spanned 3 weeks. Permission to use Bully Busters (Grades K-5) was granted by Research Press for the purpose of this research project.

### *Procedure*

Horne et al. (2003) recommended delivery of in-service training in three 2-hour sessions. All three sessions delivered for the current study included didactic as well as experiential training, as recommended by the authors.

Session I provided an overview of Bully Busters, as well as a discussion of different ways a school can implement the Bully Busters program. A folder containing the Classroom Interaction and Awareness Chart (CIAC; Horne et al., 2003, p. 347) was distributed to each participant. The CIAC was developed to help teacher evaluation of amount and degree of bullying in the classroom (p. 11). The CIAC was introduced and discussed. Additional didactic training covered Increasing Awareness of Bullying (Module 1), and an experiential activity called That's Garbage.

Session II covered instruction on Preventing Bullying in Your Classroom (Module 2), Building Personal Power (Module 3), and Recognizing the Bully (Module 4) through didactic communication. Experiential activities included The Drop Box, One for All, Can You Hear Me Now? and Bullies at Work.

Session III delivered instruction on Recognizing the Victim (Module 5), Recommendations and Interventions for Bullying Behavior (Module 6), Recommendations and Interventions for Helping Victims (Module 7), and Relaxation and Coping Skills

(Module 8). Experiential activities included Who's the Victim?, Bully, Be Gone!, Anger Busters, Act One, and People Puppets.

The TISK-E measure was distributed to control group participants at the beginning of Session III. Participants filled out the instrument prior to beginning Session III, and the instrument was collected. A short debriefing, allowing time for participant questions, took place, after which control participants left the area and Session III for treatment participants training began.

Six weeks after Session III, delayed posttest data were collected from treatment and control participants to assess retention of in-service instruction. Participants were, again, debriefed and thanked for their participation. Each treatment participant was given a copy of *Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders* for participation in and completion of the study.

### *Research Design and Statistical Analysis*

Help for the Bully/Peer Abuse Problem: Is Bully Busters In-Service Training Effective? utilized an experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Statistical analyses consisted of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to determine if there was a significant difference between the mean scores of treatment participants who received the in-service Bully Busters training and Control participants who did not receive the in-service Bully Busters training on the TISK-E.

## **Results**

### *Research Question One:*

What effect will an in-service training using the *Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders, Grades K-5* (Horne et al., 2003) program have on the knowledge and skills of elementary school teachers?

For research question one, ANCOVA results were significant for seven of the eight modules, resulting in rejection of the first null hypothesis. Treatment Group participants demonstrated significantly higher acquisition of knowledge for the awareness of bullying (Module 1); how to prevent bullying in the classroom (Module 2); behavior characteristics of bullies and victims (Modules 4 and 5); recommendations and interventions for bullying behaviors/helping victims of peer abuse (Modules 6 and 7); and management of self-and-student stress associated with bullying behaviors (Module 8).

### *Research Question Two:*

Will there be any residual effect of skills acquired during an in-service training using the *Bully Busters: A*

*Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders, Grades K-5* (Horne et al., 2003) program among treatment participants 6 weeks after the training?

For research question two, ANCOVA results were significant for four of the eight modules, resulting in rejection of the second null hypothesis. Treatment participants demonstrated significant retention of knowledge acquired during in-service training for recognizing behaviors and characteristics of bullies and victims (Modules 4 and 5) and identifying recommendations and interventions for bullies and victims (Modules 6 and 7).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

1. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study believed Bully Busters training was critically important for increased teacher awareness of the bully/peer abuse problem in the classroom and at school.
2. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study believed Bully Busters training effectively increased teacher self-efficacy for implementing interventions to address bullying behaviors and victim behaviors.
3. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study believed Bully Busters training was critically important for acquiring coping strategies related to the stress of bully/peer abuse problems in the classroom, and teaching those coping strategies to their students.
4. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study considered the Bully Busters program easy to implement in the classroom and school-wide.
5. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study maintained their awareness of the bully/peer abuse problem in the classroom and schoolwide for at least 6 weeks.
6. Teachers and auxiliary personnel in the current study maintained their self-efficacy for skill acquisition related to bully/victim interventions in the classroom and school wide for at least 6 weeks.

### Recommendations for the Field and Future Research

Some comments given during the three-session training indicated the growing need to adequately equip those entering the field of counseling/teaching with skills Bully Busters emphasizes. To this end, it may be beneficial to incorporate Bully Busters training into

counselor-education and elementary education course curriculum.

Regarding future research, it may be beneficial to compare experienced counselors and teachers with inexperienced counselors and teachers to see if a difference in skill acquisition is demonstrated.

Treatment participants expressed a desire to undergo intensive Bully Busters training. It may be beneficial to investigate the effectiveness of Bully Busters training delivered in an intensive 1-day or weekend workshop as compared to the present study's three-session in-service training.

In order to change the current trend of school violence, it is imperative that researchers identify effective tools to equip counselors and educators for the important task of bully prevention at school. The present research suggest that *Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders, Grades K-5* (Horne et al., 2003), is an effective means to that end.

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## Appendix

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This study was made possible, in part, by a grant from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). The primary researcher wishes to thank Susan Gorin, CAE, NASP's Executive Director, and Judy Martin, for their assistance.

Special thanks are extended to David Berry, the teachers, and the staff of Foothills Elementary School for their excellent participation and encouragement.

Lastly, special thanks are extended to Andy Horne, Dawn Carlson-Newman, and Christi Bartolomucci for their feedback and encouragement during this study.

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