Evaluating the Role of Parenting in Bullying Prevention

Jessica Norton, MS and Adrienne M. Duke, PhD
Human Development & Family Studies and Alabama Cooperative Extension Systems
Auburn University

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

extension

Abstract

The aim of this evaluation study is to examine possible moderating effects of adolescent perceived parenting on the effectiveness of the *Be SAFE, Affirming, and Fair Environments (Be SAFE)* bullying prevention curriculum. Using family systems theory, this evaluation focuses on the influence of parenting on the change in adolescent bullying attitudes and behaviors after completing an adapted version of the *Be SAFE* bullying prevention curriculum. Findings show that on average adolescents reported engaging in more bullying behaviors after participating in the *Be SAFE* program, and adolescents who perceived their parents to be permissive reported significantly greater increases in bullying behaviors than adolescents who perceived their parents to be authoritarian and authoritative.

Introduction

Familial characteristics have been linked to bully statuses in childhood and adolescence (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Specifically, studies have found effects of parenting on bullying and aggressive behaviors in adolescence (Cross & Barnes, 2014; Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013). Though research has linked parenting to bullying and aggressive behaviors in adolescence, these links have not been fully explored in bullying prevention and intervention research (Axford et al., 2015; Cross & Barnes, 2014; Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013). Most studies on intervention effectiveness are focused on program implementation and program components; however, there is a gap in the literature examining familial characteristic's influence on the effectiveness of interventions.

Family systems theory suggests that the ways in which adolescents interact with peers may be learned through parent-child interactions, which can influence their perceptions of acceptable behaviors (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Thus, prevention programs that target attitude and behavior change, bullying in particular, should consider interaction patterns adolescents have grown accustom to through their interactions with parents. Understanding the effects of parenting in adolescent prevention and interventions can be of benefit to program developers and evaluators alike. As evaluators, we must think beyond the context in which evaluation is performed and more towards salient contexts of those we intend to serve.

Family-inclusive prevention and intervention programs are designed based on research linking familial characteristics to adolescent behavior. These programs often examine familial characteristics in their evaluations. Evaluations of universal student-only programs rarely test the effects of parenting in their evaluations and often limit their focus on the school context and program components. Though parents may not be incorporated in universal student-only bullying prevention programs, parent-child interactions may effect adolescent program outcomes. Furthermore, program evaluations should consider the influence of family and the home context on the effectiveness of interventions.

The Be SAFE program was used to begin to understand how parenting may influence the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs for early adolescents. The current evaluation study explores the moderating effects of adolescents' perceived parenting on adolescent bullying attitudes and behaviors after completing the reduced Be SAFE program.
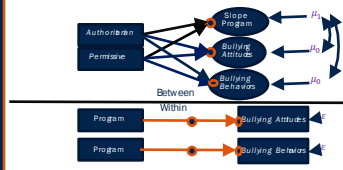
Methods

Bullying Behaviors. Adolescents self-reported their bullying behaviors pre- and post-program via the "Getting Along with Others" subscale. The "Getting Along with Others" scale from the Student School Survey (SSS), measured on a 4-point Likert Scale (A lot, Several Times, Once or Twice, and Never, respectively). Some items are recoded so that less bullying behaviors will be coded as lower.

Bullying Attitudes. Adolescents' bullying attitudes are self-reported pre- and post- program with eight items from the revised Pro-victim Scale (Rigby, 1997). The "Pro-victim" subscale measures students' attitudes toward victims with a 3-point nominal scale (*agree, disagree,* and *unsure*). Some items are recoded so that positive attitudes towards victims of bullying were coded as higher.

Parental Warmth and Rejection. Egna Minnen Betr'affende Uppfostran (EMBU-C) is Swedish for My Memories of Upbringing (Castro et al. 1993). Emotional warmth is measured by 19 items that assess whether parents give special attention, praise for approved behavior, unconditional love, support and demonstrate affection to their adolescent. Parental rejection is assessed by 17 items that measure parental hostility, punishment, disparagement, and blaming of subject. Items are measured on a 4-point Likert Scale with answer categories 'yes, almost always,' 'yes, often,' 'yes, sometimes,' and 'no.' All items for the "emotional warmth" and "rejection" scales are coded so "yes, almost always" is rated as high; thus, high rates on either scale indicate more warmth or rejection.

Parenting Style. The Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (PPSS) assesses adolescent perceived parenting style. (McClun & Merrell, 1998). The PPSS is a short form that groups six statements that allow adolescents to choose one of the three major parenting styles (permissive, authoritative, authoritarian). Participants mark box with statements that best describes the behaviors of their parent.
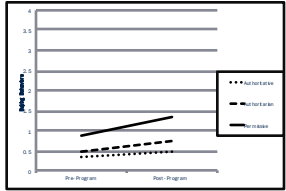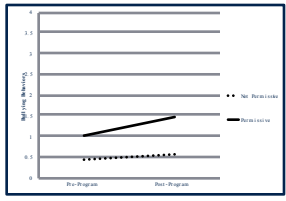

Variable	# of Items	Alpha Coefficient	Sample Items/ responses
Parenting Styles	3		
Authoritarian	–	–	My parent does not allow me to make my own decisions very often.
Authoritative	–	–	My parent is willing to listen to my views and viewpoints.
Permissive	–	–	My parent allows me to do almost what I want to do.
Parental Warmth	19	0.95	Do you feel that your parent considers your opinions?
Parental Rejection	17	0.86	Does your parent criticize/punish you for minor things?
Bullying behaviors (T1)	8	0.81	I pushed, shoved, tripped, or picked a fight with students who I knew are weaker than me.
Bullying behaviors (T2)	8	0.86	
Bullying Attitudes (T1)	8	0.53	You should not pick on someone who is weaker than you.
Bullying Attitudes (T2)	8	0.72	

Results

The sample consists of 87 seventh grade students who completed the Be SAFE curriculum. Students range in age from 12-15 ($M = 12.77$, $SD = 0.68$). The sample is almost equally male (52.9%) and female (43.7%). The sample is 54% European-American, 23% African American or Black, 2.9% of mixed races, 9.2% Hispanic/Latino, 3.4% Asian, and 1.1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Of the 61 adolescents who reported on their parent's parenting style, 51 perceive their parents to be authoritative (83.6%), and only a small number perceive their parents to be authoritarian (6.9%, N = 6) and permissive (6.6%, N = 4).

An unconditional model examined the change in adolescent bullying behaviors after completing the Be SAFE program. Approximately 73% of the variance in change in behaviors is between students ($ICC = 0.73$). The average cluster size is 1.90; which in the case of two time repeated measures means, on average, participants had 1.9 responses out of 2 ($N = 163$; design effect =1.66). The average pre-test score was 0.44 ($SE = 0.05$; $p < 0.001$), which is indicative of low bullying behaviors; a main effect of change in bullying behaviors after the program was found ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.001$). This suggests that on average, there was a significant increase in bullying behaviors in the sample overall. Significant variance remained in the slope ($\varepsilon = 0.06$, $SE = 0.03$; $p = 0.057$) and in the intercept ($\varepsilon = 0.16$, $SE = 0.03$; $p < 0.001$) for this model, whereas adolescent perceived parenting predicts the intercept of bullying behaviors. On average adolescents who perceive their parents to be permissive have a higher intercept of bullying behaviors ($\beta = 0.55$, $SE = 0.18$; $p < 0.01$) than those with perceived authoritative parenting ($M = 0.36$, $SE = 0.05$; $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

While these findings are specific to the Be SAFE bullying prevention curriculum in a particular school, they are important to program research and evaluation. They suggest that adolescent's outcomes may not be solely reliant on the program, but there are distal program factors that contribute to whether programs seem to be effective. Understanding how parenting can affect program effectiveness is important to program design. Applied researchers and evaluators could benefit from knowing if certain types of parenting facilitate or impede with the lessons given in similar programs. There is a possibility that we find effectiveness in subgroups that we do not see overall. The current study findings suggest possible differential effects of parenting dimensions on bullying attitudes as compared to bullying behaviors.

Conclusion

The current study results also found perceived parenting to predict pre-program reports of bullying behaviors. Adolescents who characterized their parents as permissive have more pre-program bullying behaviors than adolescents who perceive their parents to be authoritarian and authoritative. Adolescents who perceive their parents to be high in warmth have less bullying behaviors pre-program. On average, bullying behaviors increased from pre- to post-program, bullying behaviors were found to be moderated by perceived permissive parenting. Adolescents who perceive their parents to be permissive increase in bullying behaviors significantly more than adolescents who perceive their parents to be authoritarian and authoritative.

References

Axford, N., Farrington, D. P., Clarkson, S., Bjornstad, G. J., Wrigley, Z., & Hutchings, J. (2015). Involving parents in school-based programmes to prevent and reduce bullying: What effect does it have? *Journal of Children's Services, 10*(3), 242–251. doi: 10.1108/JCS-05-2015-0019

Castro, J., Toro, J., Van der Ende, J., & Arrindell, W. A. (1993). Exploring the feasibility of assessing perceived parental rearing styles in Spanish children with Theembu. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 39*(1), 47–57. doi: 10.1177/002076409303900105

Cross, D., & Barnes, A. (2014). Using systems theory to understand and respond to family influences on children's bullying behavior: Friendly Schools Friendly Families Program. *Theory Into Practice, 53*(4), 293–299. doi: 10.1080/00405841.2014.947223

Fingerman, K. L., & Bermann, E. (2000). Applications of family systems theory to the study of adulthood. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 51*(1), 5–29. doi: 10.2190/7IF8-WB3F-TMWG-TT3K

Georgiou, S. N., & Stavrinides, P. (2013). Parenting at home and bullying at school. *Social Psychology of Education, 16*(2), 165–179. doi: 10.1007/s11218-012-9209-z

Hinshaw, S. P. (2007). Moderators and mediators of treatment outcome for youth with ADHD: Understanding for whom and how interventions work. *Ambulatory Pediatrics, 7*(1), 91–100. doi: doi.org/10.1016/j.ambp.2006.04.012

Maric, M., Prins, P. J. M., & Ollendick, T. H. (2015). Moderators and mediators of youth treatment outcomes. Oxford University Press.

McClun, L. A., & Merrell, K. W. (1998). Relationship of perceived parenting styles, locus of control orientation, and self-concept among junior high Age students. *Psychology in the Schools, 35*(4), 381–90. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1520-6807(1 99810)35:4 <381 ::AID -P ITS9> 3.0.CO;2 -S

Rigby, K. (1997). Attitudes and beliefs about bullying among Australian school children. *The Irish Journal of Psychology, 18*(2), 202–220. doi: 10.1080/03033910.1997.10558140

Smokowski, P. R., & Kopasz, K. H. (2005). Bullying in school: An overview of types, effects, family characteristics, and intervention strategies. *Children & Schools, 27*(2), 101–110. doi: 10.1093/cs/27.2.101