News from the Unit

"Lots of things are on the boil," says Anne. They include...

Version 6 of the Primary Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (working with other 'prime movers' in the Unit);

Lifestyles -- a primary version is in the pipeline;

North Essex secondary surveys: analysing their data for 1994 and 1996 and writing a report;

PLUS a variety of additional services for schools in Essex, Sandwich, and Glasgow.

In other words, she says, after caravanning through France: 'Back to business!'

Beryl points out that although many of the data-preparation team take well-deserved holiday breaks during August, the Unit continued to be fully operational. In fact, the summer provided a very useful catch-up period after the spring deluge of questionnaire scripts.

She reports that the data for a large number of Student Health & Lifestyle Surveys were entered, and Corwell provided us with their annual 5,000 questionnaire respondents related to the smoking habits of their passengers. Other Health Related Behaviour Surveys have been coming in from Bedford, Glasgow, and Lewisham.

David has been working at Student Health & Lifestyle data, revising the Primary Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, polishing the Unit's forthcoming cross-curricular alcohol education and environmental education books; and working on an 'alcohol' database. He has published a paper on Childhood's Light, and was recently a privileged guest during Ian Macgregor's annual visit to the Unit to probe for dental data, thus extracting information about flooding and related behaviours.

Sally has been working with James, Anne and David to produce convenient information sheets about the Unit. If you would like to know about one complete range of surveys and products (the length of the list may surprise you!) she will be pleased to send you more detailed information.

John has been heavily committed to consolidating the financial status of the Unit within Exeter University.

J.M.

Some Unit Publications...

Young People and Illegal Drugs in 1996

£5.00

A report based on data collected between 1987 and 1996 using the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire.

Cash and Carry?

£10.00

A report based primarily upon responses from more than 5,000 boys and girls aged 14-15, living in 65 communities within 7 different regions in England (total sample 11,613 between the ages of 12 and 16).

Toothbrushing in Adolescence

£10.00

A study of the toothbrushing habits and motivation of 770 13-16 year olds, revealing unexpected links between dental care and features of their home background and daily life.

Video Track: 'The Extra Guest'

£14.68

This well-received 'alcohol' video depicts a teenage party, and the materials include background information, suggestions for its use, workbooks, and overhead transparencies. (Price includes VAT.)

Very Young People in 1991-2

£9.50

Results from 7,852 very young people between the ages of 8 and 12, who completed Version 4 of our Primary Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire.

Young People in 1995

£30.00

The latest of our annual reports, with results from 23,818 young people between the ages of 10 and 15, who completed Version 17 of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire.

Cross-Curricular Sex Education

£30.00

Plans and materials for twenty modules within Art & Design, Drama, English, Geography, History, Maths, Science, Technology, in two volumes, containing 428 pages altogether. Extracts sent free on request.

Lifestyles: Mainly Moms

£17.63

A database containing health-related behaviour data for 20 Year 10 pupils obtained from Unit surveys. Using this package in the NC raises many health education topics. Please state disc type, computer, and analysis software. (Price includes VAT.)

Bullies, victims, and the code of silence

Mark Griffiths & Gillian Perkins

Almost four in every five children (79%) reported being bullied to some degree, and almost half the children (48%) admitted to bullying others at least once.

Slices, stones, and words all hurt

John Balding

Anyone questions should I ask young people?

David Regis

Vandalism or legitimate protest: what do years 10 & 11 think?

Young People in 1995

In the late 1980s, media headlines appeared to highlight public interest in the sensitive area of bullying. Schools, parents and children alike are demanding investigations and interventions to conquer this seemingly large and very serious problem.

Smith & Thompson (1991) state that bullying comes under the umbrella of aggressive behaviour and, as with aggressive behaviour generally, bullying intentionally causes hurt (physical or psychological) to the recipient. Furthermore, as a consequence, the problem may go unnoticed.

Although research into bullying is now widespread, there has been no previous research in South West England (Devon and Cornwall). This study aimed to establish figures for the incidence of bullying, in addition to age and gender differences that are associated with it. It should also be noted that previous research into bullying has been confined to state-run schools. As a consequence, this study attempted to redress the balance by investigating bullying behaviours in independent schools also. It was hypothesised that differences between the two types of school may exist due to differing philosophies, ethos, and climate.

The study

From a pool of approximately 2500 pupils, a sample of 767 (248 girls and 519 boys) from eight schools completed the questionnaire. Four schools were independent (183 children) and four were state-run (584 children). It should also be noted that of these schools, there were junior (132 children) and five were senior (635 children). The participating schools were located in the Plymouth area of Devon and the Tamar area of Cornwall.

Although there are various ways of defining what bullying is, the questionnaire and definition used in this study were based on the ones developed and tested by Olweus (1991).
In junior schools a large minority of children were moderately bullied.

All the girls from independent junior schools said they had bullied others 'sometimes' or more often.

In general, a comparison of independent and state schools did not reveal differences in bullying incidents.

Table 1: Open-ended responses by 767 junior and senior school children as to what can be done about bullying in schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>6%</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>8%</th>
<th>9%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce more strict punishments</td>
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<td>Tell someone about the bullying</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Have more supervision at breaktimes</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td>Suspend and/or expel the bullies</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nothing can be done</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Make school staff more aware of bullying</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Have strict rules regarding bullying</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td>Have better staff and student relationships</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Have someone special to deal with bullying problems</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have anti-bully support groups</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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State or independent?

Collected data for junior schools were then broken down into two different school types, independent and state. The figures for being bullied were slightly higher in state junior schools for moderate bullying (46% versus 40%) and severe bullying (16% versus 15%), but these differences were not significant. Boys from junior state schools reported being moderately bullied (49% versus 41%) and severely bullied (21% versus 16%) more often, but again this was not significant.

In senior schools no significant differences were found between independent and state senior schools with respect to the overall percentage being bullied. More girls in independent schools reported being bullied, and more boys from state schools did the same, although neither of these results reached significance.

Bully or victim?

One in ten junior-school children (10%) reported bullying others to a moderate extent, although this figure dropped to 2% for severe bullying. Moderate and severe bullying of others was reported by 13% and 3% of senior school children respectively. Although all the girls from independent junior schools said they had bullied others 'sometimes' or more often, overall significance revealed that more boys than girls bullied others, and that no significance difference existed between the independent and state schools with respect to the percentage bullying others.

Results further demonstrated that a large number of children were both bullies and victims of bullying (42%), although there were no differences between school types. However, significantly more boys than girls were simultaneously found to be both bullies and victims.

Types of bullying

By far the most common type of bullying behaviour reported was being called nasty names (64%). This was followed by being physically hurt (33%), having rumours spread about themselves (27%), being threatened (24%), not being spoken to (18%), and having belongings stolen (16%).

Further analysis showed that the bullying was mostly carried out by several boys (46%). However, it was reported that bullying was also carried out both boys and girls (22%), one boy

frequently they are bullied although this relationship was not significant.

For senior schools, overall figures depict that a friend is told about the bullying on more occasions (average 39%) than either a teacher or someone at home. In state schools second favoured to be told is someone at home (35%), and for independent school children it is a teacher (18%). As in junior schools, in all cases the bullying the more likely is a teacher to be told about it.

What should be done to prevent bullying?

The last question on the questionnaire was open-ended to allow the children to express their views on what could be done about bullying in their school. The responses fell into several categories and did not vary very much between individual schools.

Other responses not tabulated included finding out why the bully was bullying in the first place, having more activities to take part in to break times, different breaktimes for different age groups, and retaliation.

Some general comments

The results generally failed to support the hypothesis that a comparison of independent and state schools would reveal differences in bullying incidents. However, some differences did emerge regarding the types of bullying behaviour and where the bullying took place. The following findings were statistically significant:

• More state school children felt they had been threatened.
• More independent school children said they were bullied in the playground.
• More state school children reported being bullied in the classroom.

Several differences were uncovered when data from junior and senior schools were analysed — although none of them are particularly surprising.
The results echo earlier findings that bullying is more prevalent in England than elsewhere in the UK.

The South West sample in context

Overall figures for bullying showed similar proportions of victims (34%) and bullies (13%) for moderate bullying in these South West schools when compared with elsewhere in England (e.g. Malik, 1990).

However, figures for senior schools were higher than those discovered by Whitney & Smith in Sheffield (1993), i.e. 32% versus 10% for victim and 13% versus 6% for bullies. The inflated figures from the South West of England (32% and 13% for victims and bullies respectively) could be due to the fact that the questionnaire did not specify when the bullying incidents occurred. Consequently, pupils could have been reporting incidents that took place in previous terms or even years.

The results echo earlier findings that bullying is more prevalent in England than elsewhere in the UK (e.g. Mellor, 1990, in Scotland).

Gender differences

Some of the most convincing findings from this study are those regarding gender differences. A highly significant finding was that bullies were most likely male. In addition, males were over-represented as both victims of bullying and of being bullies themselves. They also suffered from physical forms of bullying and were more likely to be bullies in the playground than girls.

These significant results confirm previous findings by such authors as Boulton & Underwood (1992) and Stephenson & Smith (1989). Consistent with Whitney & Smith (1993), it was found that significantly more girls than boys experienced indirect forms of bullying such as having no one speak to them (sent to Coventry) or having rumours spread about them.

More boys experienced direct forms of bullying (e.g., being hit and kicked).

By far the most common form of bullying was name-calling — a finding also reported by Whitney & Smith (1993). However, the question arises as to whether being called nasty names, sent to Coventry, or having rumours spread about them, are actually forms of bullying?

What to do about it

The open-ended question on how to combat bullying provided some well-thought-out and potentially useful ideas. This question was included with the belief that if ideas for stopping bullying came from the pupils themselves they would be willing to support the introduction by the school of any ideas that they had themselves proposed.

- Pupils wanted more strict punishments for bullies, more strict rules and more supervision at breaktimes.
- Other interventions suggested that teachers should supervise breaktimes rather than untrained supervisors, who do not necessarily command the same respect or control.
- Some pupils proposed that at breaktimes there should be occupying activities.
- Another extremely important point made by teachers and pupils alike was that the victims should tell someone about the bullying, or someone witnessing the bullying incident should inform a responsible adult.

Confidence

All too often, fear and a code of silence stop victims denouncing what is happening. As a consequence, bullying continues. Until children have confidence in a successful and proven intervention scheme, bullying will unfortunately continue in our schools and the suffering of many young people will go undetected.

A full and very much more detailed version of this paper appears in the British Psychological Society’s Education Section Review, 20 (2), 12-22.

References


