

BACKGROUND

There has been considerable debate over the best informants and methods for the assessment of bullying (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Some studies suggested that students may overreport due to sensitization to the topic (Cornell & Bradshaw, 2015) or underreport due to social desirability or to fears of retaliation (Pelligrini, 2001). Most studies focus on student reports; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson & Sarvela (2002) observed that teacher surveys reflect lower rates of bullying problems than student data. Teachers may not have accurate perceptions of the frequency of bullying occurring in their schools (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001), they may perceive bullying as less serious, and they may not fully understand the impact it has on the students (Bauman, & Del Rio, 2006). However, most studies have focused on youth and teacher ratings of bullying specifically, as opposed to broader perceptions of school climate and safety. Moreover, some have suggested that obtaining information from multiple informants is ideal, and such data should be considered complementary in nature (Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2001). Thus, this study assessed the correspondence of student and teacher reports on bullying, school climate and school safety in Southern Illinois schools.

METHOD

Participants/Procedure

Students in grades 4-6 (n=2746) and teachers (n=657) from predominantly rural schools across Southern Illinois completed the **School Climate Survey** student and teacher forms developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and modified with permission for this project. All survey responses were anonymous, collected in groups at times designated by the schools.

MEASURES

We developed the following rationally derived scales from the School Climate Survey (youth/teacher) items:

Perceptions of School Climate (16/19 items)

Perceptions of School Safety (9/13 items)

Direct Experiences of Bullying (10 items)

Witness/Awareness of Bullying (10/12 items)

Perpetration of Bullying (10 items)

Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from .80 - .93 across the scales.

TABLES

Youth Scale Intercorrelations

Youth Scales	Climate	Safety	Bullied	Witness	Perpetrate
Climate	1.00	.94*	.75*	.90*	.76*
Safety		1.00	.72*	.88*	.76*
Bullied			1.00	.82*	.87*
Witness				1.00	.74*
Perpetrate					1.00

School N = 30 *p < .01

Teacher Scale Intercorrelations

Teacher Scales	Climate	Safety	Bullying Problems
Climate	1.00	.41*	.61**
Safety		1.00	.76**
Bullying Problems			1.00

School N = 24 *p < .05, **p < .01

Youth and Teacher Scale Intercorrelations

Scale	Teacher Climate	Teacher Safety	Teacher Bullying Problems
Youth Climate	.26	.30	.47*
Youth Safety	.29	.31	.49*
Youth Bullied	-.01	.33	.41*
Youth Witness	.23	.44*	.62**
Youth Perpetrate	.01	.37	.30

School N = 24 *p < .05/

RESULTS

We observed high intercorrelations among the youth scale scores and moderate intercorrelations among the teacher scale scores. Scores for the School Climate Scale, assessing perceptions of general comfort in the school, acceptance among peers and teachers, availability of assistance, and respect for diversity, were significantly related to perceptions of school safety in locations across the school and bullying problems, especially bullying witnessed by students. Scores for teacher perceptions of bullying problems were significantly correlated with scores for youth perceptions of school climate, safety and bullying experiences, most notably witnessed bullying. Also, youth scores from the School Climate scale demonstrated moderately significant correlations with youth ratings of perceived teacher efforts to address bullying ($r = .26, p < .001$) and perceived administrator efforts ($r = .24, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This is part of a larger project funded by the National Institute of Justice. Results of the current study suggest that student and teacher perceptions of bullying problems are related and could be similarly used for the purpose of planning school interventions. These findings are limited to elementary and middle schools, in which teachers spend greater percentages of time with the same students over the course of the day than teachers in high school settings. Perceptions of school climate were more variable, especially among students. Teachers tended to rate school climate more positively and more consistently with one another. Collectively, our data suggest that both groups of informants provide reliable and meaningful information that should be considered concurrently for administrative decision making.

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