

The Relationships Among Diversity Inclusion, Perceived Support, and Diversity-Related Bullying in Rural Schools

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INTRODUCTION

- Approximately 20-35% of students report experiencing bullying (Daley & Avant, 2004; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2013).
- Bullying is associated with negative outcomes including truancy, depression, suicidal ideation and attempt, decreased academic achievement, social relationship difficulties, and higher rates of dropout (Baruch-Dominguez, Infante-Xibille, & Saloma-Zuniga, 2016; Hong & Espelage, 2012).
- Rates of bullying may be higher for students who hold diverse identities.
 - Studies investigating racial differences in rates of bullying have yielded conflicting findings (Connell, Sayed, Gonzalez, & Schell-Busey., 2015; Peguero & Williams, 2013).
 - Students who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community experience higher rates of bullying than heterosexual, cisgender youth (Berlan et al. 2010; Friedman et al., 2011).
- Students who hold diverse identities are more likely to describe their school climate as negative (Burford, Lucassen, & Hamilton, 2017) and report lower perceptions of support (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015).
- Positive school climate has been associated with lower rates of student victimization (Connell et al., 2015) and previous research has noted benefits of enhancing student exposure to diverse populations (Rogers, McRee, & Arntz, 2009).
- The current study explored the effects of inclusivity as measured by representation of diverse groups within the curriculum and in the school environment on student perceptions of support and rates of diversity-related bullying.

Table 1: Survey Questions Assessing Student Perceptions of Diversity Inclusion in their Schools

Do you learn about the experiences and/or achievements of:
Women and girls
People of many races, cultures, and skin colors
Many religious/faith communities
People with disabilities
Students who hold LGB identities
Students who identify as transgender
People with different income levels
Diverse groups of students appear in:
Pictures and posters around the school
Displays of students work
Books and materials used in class
Class discussions
School yearbooks and newspapers
Special events and celebrations

METHOD

Participants

- Students in grades 7-12 (n = 1411) from 29 school districts across Southern Illinois completed a School Climate Survey.
- All districts were classified as Rural (Fringe/Distant/Remote) or Town (Remote) according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Measure

- The School Climate Survey was developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education to assess students' experience of bullying and harassment and perceptions of school safety, prevention and intervention efforts. Scale scores were derived to assess:
 - Perceptions of Inclusivity: Students were asked about the representation of diverse groups of people in their class materials (e.g. readings, videos) and in the school (e.g., posters, special celebrations). Items can be found in Table 1 . These items were combined to form a composite variable with good reliability ($\alpha = .87$).
 - Perceptions of support: Students were asked about how often (always, often, sometimes, never) school staff respond to bullying in different ways (e.g., try to stop bullying, ignore it, discipline those who bully, etc.). Nine items were combined to form a composite variable with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.76$).
 - Frequency of Diversity-Related Bullying: Students were asked how often (not at all, once or twice in 4 weeks, every week, many times a week, don't know) they have experienced racial, sexual, gender, homophobic, religion, disability, and income- based bullying. These items were combined to form a composite variable with excellent reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Procedure

- Surveys were completed online, anonymously, in classrooms at dates/times designated by each school district. Time to complete the survey was approximately 30 – 45 min.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Rates of Diversity-Based Bullying

Predictor	T	B	p
Support	7.330	.198	.000
Diversity Inclusion	7.093	.192	.000
Adjusted R²	.102		

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Average School Rates of Diversity-Based Bullying

Predictor	T	B	P
Support	3.053	.583	.005
Diversity Inclusion	0.163	.031	.871
Adjusted R²	.313		

RESULTS

- 24.6% of participants reported experiencing diversity-related bullying (i.e., bullying based on their gender, race, sexuality, disability, religion, or income).
- Diversity inclusion and perceived support predicted 10.2% of the variance in rates of bullying at an individual level across the 1411 youth participants ($F(2, 1410) = 81.51, p < .000$)- see Table 2.
- The data were aggregated by schools. When average scores were calculated for perceptions of diversity inclusion, support, and rates of reported bullying for each of the 29 schools, perception of diversity inclusion and support predicted 31.3% of the variance in overall school diversity-related bullying rates ($F(2, 28) = 7.369, p < .003$) - see Table 3.

DISCUSSION

- This is part of a larger project on school climate and bullying prevention funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice.
- These findings suggest that integrated diversity inclusion in the school environment and curriculum may contribute to decreased rates of diversity-related bullying.
 - School staff trainings may be beneficial to learn how to effectively integrate diversity-related material.
- Students' perceived support is also related to rates of bullying
 - Additional research is needed to identify methods of increasing perceived levels of support among students.
 - Policies explicitly prohibiting diversity-based bullying may decrease rates of such bullying (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013).

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