PANEL DISCUSSION:
Towards Empowering Research in Bullying Intervention in the Evolving Environment: The What, Why and How

K Sivan R Koran[a*], Peter K Smith[b], Noran Fauziah Yaakub[c]

[a] Faculty of Creative Industries, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Sungai Long, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia
[b] Goldsmiths, University of London, 8, Lewisham Way, London SE14 6NW, UK
[c] Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Cyberjaya, 63000 Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract
This article is based on the panel discussion was one of the sessions in International Multidisciplinary Prospective Research in Education and Social Sciences (IMPRESS21) conference that took place on 7-9 September 2021. This discussion was on bullying and the panel members were Emeritus Professor Dr Peter K. Smith (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK) who has been involved in bullying research for 30 years, and Professor Datin Dr. Noran Fauziah Yaakub (Former Professor, Cyberjaya University, Malaysia) who was a professor in psychology at Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Cyberjaya University and has the expertise in bullying invention. The panellists discussed about bullying in the evolving environment and how researchers may focus future studies not only on bullies, victims and bystanders, but also on intervention and prevention.

Keywords: Bullying intervention; empowering

1. Introduction

We might have heard and read about bullying for a long time. It is happening in institutional settings or between individuals or groups of people in normal settings. Although many research have been done about bullying in schools, universities or work settings involving both students and adults, it was not until the early 1970s that systematic research on it was attempted (Olweus, 1978).

Bullying has been defined in a variety of ways, with different groups of individuals being targeted, such as adults at work, students at school, and so on. The definitions also differ depending on the perspectives of researchers, teachers, and students.

At a school level Olweus (1993) defined bullying as, "a student is being bullied or victimized when he is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students."

On the other hand, Matthews et.al (2017) asserted that in general, bullying is defined as a harsh or aggressive behaviour directed at the victim by a perpetrator with the intent of causing psychological, emotional or physical harm as a result of an imbalance of power.

The bullying trend is changing; before, we may have heard more about traditional bullying, but more recently, we may have heard more about cyber bullying. Canadian students of Grades 4 to 12 reported much greater rates of bullying involvement before the pandemic than after the pandemic in all kinds of bullying (general, physical, verbal, and social), with the exception of cyberbullying, where variations in rates were less evident (Vaillancourt, 2021). More research on bullying is needed in order to raise public awareness and, eventually, to plan and execute feasible preventive strategies.

2. Awareness of Bullying in School

The reported bullying cases in media spark the presence of the issue. Exploration of the issues through systematic studies (research) provides evidence to explain the real scenario of bullying in schools. The evidence from research helped to identify the severity of bullying problems in schools. As a result, policies addressing bullying were drawn to assist parents in understanding the action plans of the schools over bullying issues. However, it is challenging to steer the need for a policy for anti-bullying. However, it is suggested that research output should be disseminated through media to bring awareness across various levels of people.

---

* ✉ : *sivan@utar.edu.my*

3. The Evolvement of Research and Practices in Bullying

Recently, there is an increased awareness of the types of bullying. The emergence of new forms of bullying such as cyberbullying has shifted the focus of bullying from physical aggressions. The exponential spike in technological advancement influences the field of bullying. Indirectly, technology advancement intrigues an increase in cyberbullying or other forms of harassment online. Besides the shift in the type of bullying, researchers are moving forward to explore types of interventions and their effectiveness. In which researchers focus on customizing interventions according to the types, consequences of bullying. Literature also suggests that researchers are geared toward exploring the bystander roles in addition to the victim and bully. With extensive literature and understanding of bullying, researchers are urged to study prevention for bullying. It is suggested that the preventions should include bystanders and school teachers in curbing the bullying problem. Finally, it is also suggested that modules and training should be given to teacher trainees and teachers in practices to equip the knowledge and skills in addressing bullying problems in their classroom. It can be concluded that the research focus has shifted from detection to prevention through interventions to curb bullying problems in schools.

4. Challenges in Bullying Intervention

One of the most difficult challenges in bullying interventions is changing bullies' conduct and re-directing their motivation. The bully is enticed to continue their bullying conduct because of the rewarding power and monetary factors that come with it. Therefore, practitioners are facing trouble in breaking the pre-conceived repeated bullying actions for good. Verbal instructions to stop bullying may not be the effective way to stop instead need to investigate ways to re-channel their gratification from bullying to something positive, such as sports.

5. Cohesion among the Researcher and Administrators

The success of an intervention relies not only on the participants but is also influenced by their surroundings. Lack of support from the school administrators does affect the implementation of the intervention programs. Their denial of the occurrence of bullying incidents, as well as the administrator's lack of participation, makes executing the bullying intervention activities difficult. Another hurdle for researchers is; persuading the school administration to support the intervention and convincing them of the necessity of addressing the behavioural issue.

6. Challenges in the Dissemination of the Research Output

The sustainability of the intervention program in the school needs to be established for continuous success.

Researchers are encouraged to actively engage the teachers and school administration in the knowledge transfer activities that will enable the school to continue the intervention programmes even if the funding or the proposed researcher is not available. Thus, the researchers must focus not only on proposing and executing their intervention programme, but also on empowering implementers to work independently on the programmes. It is also beneficial to actively involve the students in the research, not only as participants, but as experts, in order to learn about the current trends and demands in their world. In order to keep the study relevant and consistent throughout time, people with diverse expertise and experience backgrounds must be included. Furthermore, rather than relying just on research publications, the results should be disseminated in a variety of media. Furthermore, rather than relying just on research publications, the results should be disseminated in a variety of media. It is critical to keep writing in magazines, newspapers, and seminars in order to get the word out to the public in a timely manner. To communicate the research findings or message to the public and interest groups, appropriate and accessible channels must be used

7. Opportunities Found as a Gateway

The rising number of cyberbullying cases is alarming. In addition, cyberbullying occurrences are linked to time spent online and use of social networking sites. Therefore, researchers need to equip themselves with the current trends and issues regarding cyberbullying. Since the pandemic has caused an intense dependency on the internet and technology for survival, it is interesting to explore its effect on cyberbullying. Bullying has a variety of effects on an individual's physical, emotional, and social elements; therefore, the researcher will need to work across disciplines to analyse the student's issue. It is advisable to bring researchers to examine cyberbullying from different perspectives. The pandemic has made many accustomed to technology. Online meetings, virtual conferences, webinars, and many more activities have given a great impact on the researchers. Technological advancement has bridged the distance between researchers and empowers networking and special group interests. Now researchers are connected and could easily reach out to others for sharing or pitching for ideas. Technological advancement also never fails to enlighten researchers for continuous learning in research with abundant resources made available. Therefore, researchers can equip themselves, adapt, and progress to remain relevant and sustainable.

8. Strategies for Bullying Intervention

To better understand the phenomenon, the researchers must enhance their knowledge of a child's ecological environment, which will help them in learning the functions of a child's surroundings. This understanding is crucial in designing and

implementing the interventions for the larger community. In building an effective intervention, every layer of the child's environment must be properly addressed. The cohesion and support between the child and environment would help them respond well to the interventions. In addition, the researchers are advised to undertake a mixed-method study to get rich and comprehensive data on the studied topic. Using a variety of information sources allows for more in-depth analysis and more constructive conclusions. Finally, researchers need to ensure the sustainability of the interventions to curb the bullying problem. Failure in maintaining sustainability will cause difficulty in gathering evidence for the success of interventions.

9. Recommendations for Researchers

The following are the suggestions made by the panel members:

- Researchers must keep abreast with the growing literature in the subject of bullying It is critical to investigate the changes and trends in the field. To be a successful researcher, he or she must also be equipped with a variety of research designs and skills. In learning more about the bullying problem the researchers should look into the longitudinal research and complex analysis techniques.
- It is also crucial for the researchers need to be proactive in obtaining funding for sustainable research. Grants for research are necessary to form groups that will provide new avenues for the research.
- It is also essential in cultivating fresh talents or novice researchers to help support and advance the research agenda. Furthermore, they should collaborate in multidisciplinary fields in order to obtain an understanding of the issues from various perspectives. For example, exploring cost-effective analysis on the intervention programs to gather evidence of the intervention programs. This evidence will help to evaluate the

interventions and provides opportunities for improvement.

10. Conclusion

The issue of bullying is an ongoing problem in the community. The focus of research on bullying has shifted over the years. The researchers initially concentrated on the victim, bullies, and defining and investigating bullying. However, the focus has shifted to bullying intervention and prevention. It is also important to use the technological opportunities to work globally concerning bullying. The researchers' networking offers a platform for sharing information and experience, particularly in the area of bullying intervention. Furthermore, bringing together people from different nations might give opportunities to investigate cultural impacts on bullying interventions. Finally, the researchers' positive attitudes towards keeping abreast with new information, research skills, and having an open mind are vital in maintaining the long-term sustainability of bullying intervention research in an evolving environment.

References

Olweus, D. (1978). *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys*. Hemisphere (Wiley).

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do.* Blackwell Publishers.

Matthews, K. A., Jennings, J. R., Lee, L., Pardini. D. A. (2017). Bullying and being bullied in childhood are associated with different psychosocial risk factors for poor physical health in men. *Psychology Science*. *28*(6), 808-821. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797 617697700

Vaillancourt, T., Brittain, H., Krygsman, A., Farrell, A. H., Landon, S., Pepler, D. (2021). School bullying before and during COVID-19: Results from a population-based randomized design. *Aggressive Behavior, 47*(5), 557-569