

**The Bill Blackwood
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**The Role of Law Enforcement in
Bullying Prevention and Intervention**

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because law enforcement officers are in a unique position to help identify, prevent, and eliminate bullying behavior. The purpose of this research is to show the positive influence law enforcement officers can make in society and how their authority can help implement bullying programs to stop the fear and aggression in children. The method of inquiry included one survey that was distributed to Galveston Independent School District (ISD) students and one that was distributed to the Galveston ISD police officers and officers from surrounding departments. A collection of information for research came from a library's database, and the articles, journals, and books contained within. Interviews were also conducted with various religious leaders in the community. Questions pertaining to their personal definition of bullying as well as their ideas on how to educate and stop the occurrence of bullying were posed.

The survey, taken by the law enforcement officers, found that 39% of officers considered students' actions to be horseplay and not bullying. The survey, taken by the students, found that 30% of students stated they are bullied at school daily. Those interviewed gave definitions of bullying that included both physical and verbal bullying. The consensus among all those interviewed was that all parties involved need to be on the same page and the same expectations need to be consistently enforced.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether bullying is relevant to the contemporary law enforcement officer. Bullying has been shown to be directly related to violence in schools. Victims of bullying were more likely than non-bullied students to report that they carried weapons to school and were engaged in physical fights (National Center of Education Statistics, 2005). Surveys indicated that 11% of American schoolchildren in the sixth through the tenth grades have been bullied; 13% have engaged in bullying, as both perpetrators and victims of bullying (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simmons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). The types of crimes reported were theft, bullying, drugs, and weapons (National Center of Education Statistics, 2006). Children and youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others to reveal antisocial behavior, demonstrate violent behavior, and be involved in criminal activity. In one study, boys who were identified as bullies in middle school were four times as likely as their non-bullying peers to have three or more criminal convictions by age 24 (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying is violence, and it often leads to behavior that is more violent. It is important that officers realize children and youth who bully are more likely to own guns to gain respect or frighten others (Cunningham, Henggeler, Limber, Melton, & Nation, 2000). Bullying is a form of victimization, not conflict, as some may perceive. It is no more a "conflict" than is child abuse or domestic violence. It was also found that in 37 school shootings, 73% of shooters had been mercilessly bullied (Souter, 2007). It is also of interest to the law enforcement officer that from the research data of the 37 school shooters who survived, many wanted to be killed by the police (Souter, 2007).

Public schools are institutions of learning, and the children of society have a constitutional right to a safe and protected environment (Gahan, 2007). The relevance of this message to law enforcement is to be a positive role model and to ensure that schools are kept safe. The purpose of this research is to examine the detrimental consequences of bullying. The kind of bullying and hurtful behavior that pushes children or youth over the edge happens to thousands every single day.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not it is beneficial for law enforcement officials to become knowledgeable and familiar with a coordinated approach to bullying in schools and communities. The destructive effect of bullying needs to be countered by a collective effort, and law enforcement plays a vital role in this process. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research are to increase law enforcement officers' knowledge in their vital role within the schools and the community. The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because if an officer can reach the troubled child in his youth and offer him alternatives to violence, he may save an untold number of people of each succeeding generation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An important issue resulting from this study is that police officers should research state laws. Even though a state may not have anti-bullying laws, there are usually many laws that are applicable that deal with bullying behaviors, harassment, thefts, assaults, and extortion. All of these topics have been researched and have been found to have some correlation to bullying (National Center of Education Statistics, 2006).

Despite the research, bullying continues to be an aggressive behavior that is intentional

and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Often, it is repeated over time and can take many forms. Bullying is a common occurrence in the lives of children. Nearly every child will experience bullying at sometime during their youth. Research reports consistently high rates of frequent bullying in urban, suburban, small towns, and rural schools. Between 15% and 25% of students are bullied, and between 15% and 20% report bullying others (Melton et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001).

Overall, police officers are concerned that the schoolyard bully has gone digital. As more young people have access to computers and cell phones, a new risk to teens is beginning to emerge. Electronic aggression, in the form of threatening text messages and the spread of online rumors on social networking sites, is a growing problem. Researchers estimate that between 9% and 34% of youth are victims of so-called cyber-bullies. As many as one out of five teens has bullied another youth using digital media (Decker, 2007). Although the majority of kids who are harassed online are not physically bothered in person, the cyber-bully still takes a heavy emotional toll on his or her victims (Decker, 2007). Children who are tormented online are more likely to get detention, be suspended, skip school, or experience emotional distress. Over 160,000 students miss school everyday countrywide because of bullying (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying is still perceived by many educators and parents as a problem that involves physical contact. Most research and law enforcement efforts focus on bullying in school classrooms, locker rooms, hallways, and bathrooms (Olweus, 1993). However, with today's use of cell phones or computers by adolescents, bullying does not always involve physical contact. Social interactions have increasingly moved from personal contact at school to virtual contact in the chat room. Internet bullying has

emerged as a new and growing form of social cruelty. Cyber-bullying tactics include humiliation, destructive messages, gossip, slander, and other “virtual taunts” communicated through e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, and blogs. School districts in Florida, South Carolina, Utah, and Oregon have responded by creating new policies to deal with digital bullies. Texas and other states are enforcing rules banning communication devices in school buildings, and the state of Washington recently passed a law requiring that cyber-bullying be part of school district harassment prevention policies.

Generally, a review of the literature shows that parents are concerned about cyber-bullying, which they do not think can be stopped by banning phones in school (Decker, 2007). The proliferation of cell phone technology gives students 24/7 access to this method of communication, which increases the frequency and expands the audience worldwide. Thus, the victim of bullying now has no respite. Parents feel the tools used by bullies have changed with MySpace and blogs. However, they do not believe the content of the bully’s message has changed. When parents were in school, there were elaborate hand-drawn cartoons, signs on the board, ditties, even poetry dedicated to the systematic abuse of particular students. All embarrassing incidents were stored away in the collective memory and any code word could set the whole class laughing at the victimized student.

Parents believe that banning all communications devices is not realistic. In the wake of the Columbine incident, parents would rather young people keep their phones with them. Sykes and Matza (1957), from their research about techniques of neutralization, have concluded that society fears the consequences of bullying. This

apprehension stems from an underlying belief that society is brutal: “bullying will always be with us; its human nature and a complete unwillingness to work to improve it” (p. 667). The theory also discusses “blame the victim” philosophy statements like “deal with it,” “obviously you deserve it,” “and it made me stronger why not you” (Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 669). Thus, bullies deny their responsibility for their role in the bullying. They also deny that their actions caused injury to the victim since the victim deserved it.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined is how is bullying identified by law enforcement. The researcher hypothesizes is that bullying is not being correctly identified and therefore not being properly addressed by law enforcement. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, journals, internet sites, personal interviews and surveying participants.

This research will also be based on the attitudes of law enforcement officers towards bullying. It will also demonstrate how law enforcement officers react to bullying in the public streets verses the school setting. In order to provide the necessary information for this study, the type of study that will be utilized for this research must first be identified. Since there will be an observation of a particular sample at one point and time, the cross-sectional study will be the best form of operation. This study will be used because the research is dealing with a single period, and the study will not be measured over a long period of time.

The design method chosen will be a survey of students and police officers. The underlying reason for undertaking a bullying survey is to identify the officer’s actions and thinking process. Such information has value and should be retained as functional parts

of everyday work. A bullying survey will also identify the true feelings of the officer when investigating an incident of “horseplay” verses “bullying.” The survey will give a true meaning regarding how police officers’ decision making is evaluated when conducting an investigation and bringing about resolution. A bullying survey can define the character of a person and can provide the basis for making sound judgments.

By using a survey questionnaire, data will be used to construct a prevention plan that helps the police officer identify the problems during his/her investigation. It can lead to an increased understanding and awareness of the human environment. It can establish priorities for dealing with bullying issues within the framework of existing local planning programs in the community and present specific recommendations for meeting bullying issues within the school setting and outside the community.

The questionnaire allows specific questions to be asked that could be important to finding out information that is important to the research. It does not allow the person taking the survey to be evasive in the way the questions are answered. It gives a clear cut understanding of what is being said. Using the two surveys will ensure objectivity because by looking at the results only, an exact analyzes can occur.

The type of sampling that will be used is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of sampling in which the units to be observed are basis on the evaluators judgment about the units that will be the most representative. The reason for using the purposive sampling is because it allows the use of a variety of people in different age ranges. It also gives a variety of viewpoints from different ethnic groups, age groups, and genders. Purposive sampling will also give a truer result because of the various audiences being surveyed. Using this sample method could shed more light

on bullying issues which could lead to a revelation of ideas to better deal with this problem.

Sampling is best suited for this project because it will allow flexibility of the questions asked on both types of surveys. It will also give better reliability when it comes to the truthfulness of the student and the police officer because it allows objectivity when reading or evaluating the responses. Since the evaluator is a police officer, this survey will provide an opportunity to see if police officers are as honest as would be assumed or if law enforcement is a field in which bullying is accepted. It is importance to examine if law enforcement officers assume bullying is only horseplay and are ignoring it. The survey will determine if police officers identify bullying immediately and take appropriate action to reduce or eliminate its recurrence.

In the survey, the normal quality will be that the officers and students that are taking the survey range in ages from 14 to 50. The police officers will be grouped by age, which will be 21 to 25, 26 to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40, and 45 to 50. Age grouping will also apply to the students who are taking the survey, ages 14 to 16 and 17 to 19. This will give a range of responses from both sides and from those of different ages. The minimum requirement for the ordinal measure is satisfied because subject's ages will range from 14 through 50. By having the age range and spacing them apart by categories of age, it satisfies the interval measure.

When presenting the questionnaire to the students and police officers, since individual human beings are units of analysis, a specific agency will be chosen within the area of local law enforcement. The total amount of students surveyed was 50; 25 male and 25 female. The subject's ages ranged from 14 to 19. The reason for choosing

this class of individuals is because of the likelihood that these subjects have encountered or witnessed some type of school bullying. The total amount of police officers surveyed was 25; 18 males and 7 females. The ages of the subjects ranged from 21 to 50. This class of individuals was chosen because of the likelihood of these subjects having encountered persons involved in criminal activity that had been bullied in school or out of school.

The questionnaire will be distributed randomly, and the subjects will be given three days to complete the survey. After completion, the survey will be collected and evaluated. Afterwards, the data will be collected, compiled, and analyzed by the evaluator. The police officer survey will be administered the same way as above. The only exception will be that the questions on the two surveys will be different. The age range of the police officer survey will start at 21 since, in most states, individuals cannot become police officers until they are 21. The process of passing out the survey, collecting, and processing the survey will be handled in the same manner as in the students. The police officers' survey will be conducted using two methods: paper questionnaires and personal interviews. After the data is collected, it will also be compiled and analyzed.

In addition to the student and police officer surveys, interviews will be conducted with eight various religious leaders in the community. Three questions will be asked: what their definition of bullying is, their ideas pertaining to how law enforcement officers can help stop bullying, and how members of the community can better educate parents about bullying.

FINDINGS

The police officers taking the survey included Campus Based Police Officers (CBPO) from different independent school districts and the local city and county police officers throughout the Galveston area. The survey found that 39% of officers considered students' actions to be horseplay and not bullying; 23% stated that when investigating an altercation between students, citations are issued for disorderly conduct and no further action is taken; 18% of officers investigated when the situation involved cyber-bullying; and 20% stated that they do not take the time to investigate altercations further due to time constraints and heavy caseloads.

The CBPOs felt they are more effective when highly visible to the students and when attempting to stop problems that occur on or around the school grounds. Besides being an active, high profile law enforcement officer, a CBPO participates in the classroom by lecturing on class topics such as the history of law enforcement, search and seizure, constitutional rights, criminal law, and drug abuse. The CBPOs present prevention programs for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Topics include: personal safety; conflict resolution; drug, alcohol, and violence prevention; bullying prevention; Drug Abuse Resistance and Education (DARE); and Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) follow up programs. Oftentimes, a CBPO's duties extend beyond the classroom and normal workday. The CBPO participates in Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) sessions, faculty meetings, club projects, and social functions. Suggestions reported during the survey from experienced CBPOs provided tips for police officers not familiar with bullying prevention and intervention on the streets or in the schools.

The first tip encouraged officers to complete a thorough investigation of a bullying incident before contacting the parents of the victim and to seek suggestions for reparations before contacting the parents of the actor. Another suggestion is that when speaking to the parent of the actor, the officer can make it clear to the parent of the actor that the officer has conducted an investigation that included getting their child's account of the incident and asking their child whether or not they were bullying. The CBPO should also stress to the parents of actors that their child has violated a school rule, policy, and/or law. An additional tip offered was to consider mitigating factors when making an arrest; not all fights are a result of bullying situations, but when the fights are from bullying, officers do not need to routinely arrest both parties just because it appears they were both fighting. Keep in mind that the child being bullied is most likely not a willing participant. Boys who are bullied are typically smaller and weaker than their peers are and may fear being hurt. Children who bully usually have two or three supporters. These children and their supporters may lie about their behavior and shift the blame to the child who was bullied.

One CBPO shared that there are often frustrations in dealing with students in schools. Some students may have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Students with this plan, who bully, may not have the same consequences to conventional school rules and discipline. In cases such as this, an IEP becomes a legal document restricting the outcome punishment for misbehavior. However, a student's IEP does not restrict the action of law enforcement officers when there is a clear legal violation.

Another tip, that may seem counterintuitive, is to discourage mediation in bullying incidents. Bullying is a form of victimization, not conflict. It is no more a "conflict" than

is child abuse or domestic violence. Mediating a bullying incident may send inappropriate messages to the students who are involved, such as “We need to work out this conflict between you.” The appropriate message to the child who was bullied should be, “No one deserves to be bullied and we are going to do everything we can do to stop it.” The message for children who are bullying should be, “Your behavior is inappropriate and must be stopped.” The CBPO also stated that mediation may further victimize a child who has been bullied. It may be upsetting for a child who has been bullied to face his or her tormenter in mediation.

The student survey conducted in reference to bullying revealed that 20% of students did not feel safe walking to and from school. Twenty-five percent felt kind of safe in the classroom setting, and 15% did not feel safe while in the cafeteria at school. Of the participants, 17% did not feel safe in the hallways at school, while changing classrooms. Thirty percent of the participants stated that they are bullied at school daily, and 23% observed bullying at school every day.

Religious leaders in the community that were interviewed gave definitions that included physical bullying: hitting, kicking, pushing, choking, punching; and verbal bullying: threatening, taunting, teasing, and hate speech. The consensus among all those interviewed was that all parties involved need to be on the same page and the same expectations need to be consistently enforced throughout the community and the schools.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not bullying was being properly identified by law enforcement. The purpose of this research

was to clearly define bullying as a major problem and to offer possible solutions for law enforcement involvement with bullying. The research question that was examined was focused on how law enforcement identified bullying.

The researcher concluded from the findings that bullying is a severe problem and is not being properly identified by law enforcement. Often tending to view bullying as horseplay, police officers appear to be surprisingly unaware of the effects of bullying.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis and why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to the police officer's apparent gullibility and that they rarely conduct comprehensive investigations into bullying. Based on the findings, some recommendations can be made to police officers to encourage intervention prevention regarding bullying. In conclusion, the following recommendations are made for police officers.

Police officers can recognize that almost 1/3 of students do not feel safe at school or walking to and from school. In general, officers need to be educated in the causes and consequences of bullying, in techniques for intervening appropriately in bullying incidents, and in the prevention of bullying. Bullying should be addressed holistically as it is a pervasive societal problem. Officers are encouraged to educate parents on how to recognize when their children are perpetrators of bullying. Officers can also educate parents on how to build their children's self-confidence if their children are being bullied. Police officers can involve parents in addressing bullying with school officials and the community and should encourage schools to confront bullying by publishing the consequences for bullying and consistently reinforcing punishment. Police officers can lobby for technical solutions to identify Cyber Bullying more efficiently

and should lobby for the development of digital transcripts that should be mandated, encrypted, and secured against data corruption indefinitely. Police officers can insist on remedial education programs focusing on socially civil behavior for all bullies and encourage schools to offer formal bullying education programs as part as their curriculum. Police officers can lobby for laws in the state of Texas pertaining to enforcement of bullying infractions. Police officers can educate adults and children in the importance of not sharing sensitive information and should be sensitive to students who are victims of bullying by following the tips reported in the findings section of this paper.

The study of bullying is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because, If society merely continues to place a bandage on the pervasive problem of bullying, the nation will face continued problems with violence in schools. Law enforcement officers can stem this tide by playing a pivotal, proactive role in the prevention of bullying by following the above recommendations.

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APPENDIX 1

Police Survey

THE ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION OF BULLYING

There is a new concern about school and street violence, and police have assumed greater responsibility for helping school officials ensure students safety. As pressure increases to place officers in schools, police agencies must decide how best to contribute to student safety.

Police Questionnaire About Bullying

1. As a police officer, when you are call out to an incident involving young kids fighting, what action do you take?
 - A. Take action, no questions asked, and cite for disorderly conduct.
 - B. Investigate just the bare minimum.
 - C. Investigate fully, ask questions, obtain information,, then cite.
2. As a police officer who sees two young people physically grabbing and pushing one another, how did you perceive their actions?
 - A. Horse play
 - B. Do not consider as fighting
 - C. Turn your head and walk away
3. Do you respond in a timely manner to all reports of bullying?
 - A. always
 - B. sometimes
 - C. when there is time
4. As a police officer, have you taken steps to establish support programs and resources for both the target and the bully? If you answer yes, explain.
5. As a police officer, have you taken the time to develop policies that define bullying and provide appropriate responses to the problem? If you answer yes, explain.
6. Have you assisted in establishing an effective system for reporting bullying,

including adults who can be relied on to respond responsibly and sensitively. If you answer yes, explain.

7. Have you taken the time to educate parents to understand bullying and the consequences? If you answer yes, explain.

8. Have you partnered with school and mental health agencies to identify and address cases of serious bullying? If you answer yes, explain.

9. Have you promoted the norm for a bully-free school throughout the entire school community? If you answer yes, explain.

10. Have you engage students to help promote the norm of a bully-free school?. If you answer yes, explain.

APPENDIX 2

Student Survey Bullying Questionnaire Survey for Students

1. HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?

How safe do feel in your classroom?

- a. very unsafe and scared
- b. kind of safe
- c. so-so
- d. kind of safe
- e. very safe

How safe do feel on the playground?

- a. very unsafe and scared
- b. kind of safe
- c. so-so
- d. kind of safe
- e. very safe

How safe do you feel in the cafeteria?

- a. very unsafe and scared
- b. kind of safe
- c. so-so
- d. kind of safe
- e. very safe

How safe do you feel going to and from school, walking or taking the bus?

- a. very unsafe and scared
- b. kind of safe
- c. so-so
- d. kind of safe
- e. very safe

How safe do you feel in the hallways?

- a. very unsafe and scared
- b. kind of safe
- c. so-so
- d. kind of safe
- e. very safe

2. HOW OTHERS TREAT YOU?

How often do other students bully you by laying their hands on you (hitting, kicking, or pushing you or hurting your body) in school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often do other students bully you by saying mean things to you (things that hurt your feelings)?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often do other students bully you by spreading mean rumors about you?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often do other students bully you by leaving you out of their activities to hurt your feelings at school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

In what grade is the student or students who bully you?

- a. I haven't been bullied.
- b. in my classroom
- c. in the same grade as I but in a different class
- d. in a lower class
- e. in a higher grade

If you have been bullied this year, which have you told or asked for help?

- a. I haven't been bullied
- b. my mother or father
- c. my sister or brother
- d. a teacher or other adult at school
- f. nobody

How often do you spend recess or lunchtime alone because nobody wants to hang around with you?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

3. HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS:

How often do other students bully you by laying their hands on you (hitting, kicking, or pushing you or hurting your body) in school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never
- f. only if there's a fight

How often do you bully others by saying mean things, teasing others or calling other students names at your school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often do you spread mean rumors or leave other students out of your activities to be mean?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often do you make sexual comments to other students who you know are likely to be bothered by the remarks?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

4. WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN AND HEARD?

How often have you seen other students bully you by laying their hands on you (hitting, kicking, or pushing you or hurting your body) in school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often have you heard another student bully others by saying mean things, teasing or calling names to other students at your school or on the school bus?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often have you heard another student spread mean rumors or leave other students out of your activities to be mean?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

How often have you heard another student bully by making sexual comments to other students who you know are likely to be bothered by the statements?

- a. every day
- b. once or twice per week
- c. once or twice per month
- d. once or twice per year
- e. never

5. HOW HAVE YOU REACTED?

How have you done when you have seen a student being hit, kicked, pushed, punched, or otherwise physically hurt in school or on the bus?

- a. I have never heard or seen another student being bullied.
- b. I walked away and ignored the incident.
- c. I stood and watched.
- d. I helped the person who was being targeted.
- e. I helped the bully.
- f. I laughed.

What have you done when you have heard a student being teased or called names in school or on the school bus?

- a. I have never heard another seen another student being bullied.
- b. I walked away and ignored the incident.
- c. I stood and watched.
- d. I helped the person who was being targeted.
- e. I helped the bully.
- f. I laughed.

If you helped a target in a bullying situation, how did you help?

- a. by telling an adult
- b. by later telling the target that you thought what the bully did was mean.
- c. by telling the bully to stop.
- e. other
- f. I didn't help.

6. GANGS

I know of students in my school who are members of a gang or who are wannabes.

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. wannabes but not members
- d. We don't have gangs, just popular kids who control others.

How much of a problem do you think gangs are in your schools?

- a. a huge problem
- b. a big problem
- c. somewhat of a problem
- d. no problem

7. CONCLUSION

How much of a Bullying do you think Bullying is in our schools? **Remember that bullying occurs when one person or group of people keeps hurting another person with words or actions.**

- a. a huge problem
- b. a big problem
- c. somewhat of a problem
- d. no problem