THE INCIDENCE OF BULLYING IN A BEIJING PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT
Bullying in school has become a widespread problem and is increasing at an alarming rate in China. Bullying is described as “repeated aggressive acts against a specific target (the victim) who cannot easily defend him or herself”. The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which bullying took place in a typical middle school in China. The study adopted a quantitative non-experimental survey design. A sample of 303 middle school students responded to one questionnaire on the extent of bullying. Results of the study show that bullying occurred in this middle school in the city of Beijing in China. The incidence of bullying generally declined from grade 7 to grade 9. Boys engaged in bullying behavior and were victims of bullying more frequently than girls.

Keywords: Bullying, Bullies, Victims

1. Introduction
Bullying remains one of the largest problems in schools and without a doubt it is a growing and critical problem in schools, with the percentage of students reportedly bullied at least once per week steadily increasing (Rigby & Smith, 2011). Additionally, cyberbullying has become more rampant and has contributed to the suicides among children. Since Olweus’s (1978) pioneering research on bullying three decades ago, it seems that bullying is still a major social concern in most parts of the world. It is often in the news, which is a reflection of ongoing public concern and the need for countering bullying in schools (Rigby & Smith, 2011).

In recent years, bullying among students in school has also been recognized as an important educational problem (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). It is a serious problem in schools, not only because of its short-term effects on students, such as academic problems, anxiety, truancy, but also because of its long term effects on all the students, such as depression, low self-confidence, and school dropouts (Rigby, 1999). International research suggested that bullying is common in schools and takes place at all grade levels.

A definition of bullying
An agreed-upon definition of bullying in western studies is that, it is described as “repeated aggressive acts against a specific target (the victim) who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Olweus, 2010, p. 11). Three criteria for bullying have to be considered, an aggressive act must be intentional and repeated, and involves an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1999, p. 10–11).

Extent of bullying in China
Findings from several research studies showed that bullying and victimization were a major problem in China. Based on Beijing Global School-Based Health Survey (GSHS) conducted in 2003, 20% of adolescents said that they have been bullied out of a total of 2,348 adolescents who participated in the survey. Twenty three percent of males and 17% of females were identified as victims. Qiao, Xing, Ji and Zhang (2009) presented the results of a national study that showed that of the total 177,578 urban middle school students in 18 provinces in China, 66.1% of boys and 48.8% of girls were bullied respectively. A cross-sectional study which surveyed 8,342 middle
school students in four cities in Guangdong province found that 20.83% of students were bullies, while 18.99% were victims of bullying (Wang et al., 2012). Finally, Chan and Wong (2015) found that victims of bullying varied in Chinese schools, from as low as 2% to as high as 66% reported in different surveys in China.

Gender and grade influence the extent of bullying (Banks, 1997). Researchers have found that boys were more aggressive than girls, namely that boys are involved in bullying and are victimized more than girls (Joliffe & Farrington, 2011; Lai, Ye, &Chang, 2008; Qiao et al., 2009). An Asian regional study across ten Asia-Pacific countries conducted by Lai et al. (2008) showed that boys were more likely to be victims of bullying in schools than girls with between 20 to 30 percent of boys having been bullied physically by their peers. Joliffe and Farrington (2011) found that boys were more likely to engage in bullying than girls with about 27% of boys and about 15% of girls being involved in bullying. Furthermore, findings from Chinese studies indicated that boys were more aggressive than girls in bullying perpetration (Qiao et al., 2009).

Much of the research suggests that bullying is a common type of school violence which occurs frequently in middle school (Banks, 1997; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006; Orpinas, McNicholas, & Nahapetyan, 2015). Banks (1997) found that physical bullying peaked in lower secondary school year, and decreased during the upper secondary years. Scheithauer et al. (2006) also found that sixth through eighth grades students bullied more frequently than fifth or tenth graders. Another longitudinal study has also found that prevalence of relational bullying at middle school level was higher than that at high school. This longitudinal study involved 620 students in grades 6-12 for 7 years, with a result showing that relational bullying reached high level in grades 6, 7, or 8 and declined in grades 9 through 12 (Orpinas et al., 2015). In China, high school students reported a lower level of bullying than middle school students (Qiao et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012).

Within that age group, research studies have shown that as students grow older, the incidence of bullying declined (Banks, 1997; Seals & Yong, 2003; Veloo, 2012; Chen & Avi Astor, 2009). Banks (1997) found that as many as 7% of grade 8 students were reported to have stayed at home at least once a month due to bullies. Another study of 454 students in grades 7 through nine, Seals and Yong (2003), found that students in grade 7 bullied more than grade 8 or grade 9 students. Veloo (2012) also found that the incidence of bullying declined from grades 7 to 10. Furthermore, Chen and Avi Astor (2009) conducted a study among 14,000 students from middle schools (grades 7 to 9) and found that the incidence of bullying increased from grade 7, peaked at grade 8 and decreased in the higher grades.

From the above findings it can be seen that the extent of bullying is serious in Chinese schools, especially in middle schools. The Chinese school administrators and police have pledged to fight against bullying in school. Since then, several anti-bullying polices have been released promising strong actions against bullies. However, there is still a lack of rigorous academic studies to help the public and authorities understand the real picture of school bullying in China, and implement prevention and intervention strategies. While much of the research available on bullying in school is limited to the Western countries, especially in Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, USA, Canada and Australia (Rigby & Smith, 2011; Sittichai & Smith, 2015), there is a lack of empirical studies on school bullying in China (Han, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017). Moreover, the study on the extent of bullying in China is sparse compared to the volume of research in the Western countries (Han et al., 2017; Li, 2008). This study is thus an attempt to explore the extent and nature of bullying in a Chinese public middle school in Beijing, China.

2. Focus of Study
This study was guided by the following research questions:
What is the extent of bullying experienced by grades 7, 8 and 9 students in an urban middle school(a) in Beijing, China?
Are there differences in the frequency and nature of bullying experienced by boys and girls? (b) Where does bullying normally take place and who would the victims confide in after they have(c) been bullied?

The study involved three intact classes of students from each of grades 7, 8, 9 and the respondents were randomly chosen from a public middle school in Beijing, participated in the study. Their mean age of respondents ranged from 12 to 15 years old. A total of 303 students were involved in the study.

Data for the study was collected using a questionnaire which is based on the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). The Cronbach alpha values of the instruments were above 0.84 and this indicated that the instruments was reliable.
3. Results and Discussion
Given below in are the main findings of the study. Table 1 shows frequencies and percentages of bullying victims during the previous term by class. Of the total of 303 students surveyed, about 74% of grade 7 students, about 63% of grade 8 students and about 54% of grade 9 students said that they had been bullied at school during the school term. The extent of bullying experienced by students at each of three levels was different. The results show that there was a decline in the extent of bullying experienced by students from grade 7 to grade 8 and from grade 8 to grade 9. The differences in the extent of bullying experienced by students at each of three levels was statistically significant ($\chi^2=22.35; p<0.001$).

Table 1: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of Victims by Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullied</th>
<th>Class 7</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
<th>Class 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>26(25.7%)</td>
<td>37(36.6%)</td>
<td>46(45.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>71(70.3%)</td>
<td>51(50.5%)</td>
<td>39(38.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>4(4%)</td>
<td>13(12.9%)</td>
<td>16(15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 22.35 Significant at p<0.001

Table 2 shows frequencies and percentages of victims of bullying by gender. Bullying experienced by males in this school were statistically significantly different from that experienced by female students ($\chi^2=11.74; p<0.01$). This result is consistent with findings from literature, where it has been found that boys were being bullied more frequently than girls (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Qiao et al., 2009).

Table 2: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of Victims by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullied</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>41(27.2%)</td>
<td>6(44.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>88(58.2%)</td>
<td>7(48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>22(14.6%)</td>
<td>11(7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square =11.74 Significant at p<0.01

Entries in Table 3 show that about 39% of grade 7 students, 41% of grade 8 students and 31% of grade 9 students reported that they had bullied others at school during the school term. The differences in the frequencies of bullying between grades were statistically significant ($\chi^2=19.13; p<0.001$). The results show that there was a decline in the frequencies of bullying as the students move from grade 7 to 9. The results also show that in contrast to victims of bullying, there were fewer bullies in school.

Table 3: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of Bullies by Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullied</th>
<th>Class 7</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
<th>Class 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>62(61.4%)</td>
<td>60(59.4%)</td>
<td>70(69.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Entries in Table 4 show that there was a statistically significant difference in the number of male and female bullies in this study (Chi square = 14.28; p<0.01). The results also confirm findings published in the literature, that boys are involved in bullying behaviour more frequently than girls (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Qiao et al., 2009).

Table 4: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of Bullies by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullied</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>82 (54.3%)</td>
<td>110 (72.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>63 (41.7%)</td>
<td>42 (27.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>6 (4.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 14.28 Significant at p<0.01

Table 5 shows that verbal bullying was more common among boys than girls. Relational bullying was more frequently among girls than boys. “Verbal bullying”, such as ‘mean names or teased’, ‘means names or gestures with sexual meaning’ and ‘hit or kicked’ which were ranked high by boys, differences were noticed in the ranking of other items. The rank order correlation (Spearman Rho= 0.57, p<0.05) although significant, indicates that there was a difference in the ranking of items by boys and girls. This implies that the nature and frequency of bullying experienced by boys were different from that of girls.

Table 5: Frequencies and Percentages of Types of Bullying Experienced by Boys and Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Bullying</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean names called</td>
<td>85 (56.2%)</td>
<td>49 (32.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit or kicked</td>
<td>60 (39.7%)</td>
<td>17 (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual gestures</td>
<td>55 (36.5%)</td>
<td>39 (25.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money taken/things damaged</td>
<td>41 (27.2%)</td>
<td>22 (14.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumour spread</td>
<td>34 (22.5%)</td>
<td>45 (29.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 6 shows that the classroom was the place where most of the bullying occurred. About 30% reported that they were bullied in the classroom when the teacher was not present. In the ‘playground’ (11%), ‘travelling to school’ (7%), ‘hallways’ (6%), and ‘online’ (3%). It is a matter of concern to note that a large percentage of students indicated that they had been bullied in classroom. This is probably due to the fact that students spend more time in their classroom than on the playground in urban middle schools in Beijing.

Table 6: Frequencies and Percentages of locations where bullying occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In class</th>
<th>Playground</th>
<th>travel to School</th>
<th>Corridor</th>
<th>Online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excluded from</td>
<td>28(18.6%)</td>
<td>34(11.2%)</td>
<td>22(7.3%)</td>
<td>19(6.3%)</td>
<td>9(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to do things</td>
<td>25(16.6%)</td>
<td>34(11.2%)</td>
<td>22(7.3%)</td>
<td>19(6.3%)</td>
<td>9(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other ways</td>
<td>14(9.2%)</td>
<td>34(11.2%)</td>
<td>22(7.3%)</td>
<td>19(6.3%)</td>
<td>9(3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, entries in Table 7 shows that about 30% would tell a ‘friend’ and about 15% would tell their ‘class teacher’ when bullied. Only 8 percent of the students would tell their ‘parents’.

Table 7: Frequencies and percentages of persons students would report to when bullied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class teachers</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Brothers/sisters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46(15.2%)</td>
<td>92(30.4%)</td>
<td>24(7.9%)</td>
<td>7 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Summary of Results and Discussion

The purpose of study was to identify the extent and nature of bullying that took place among grades 7, 8 and 9 students in an urban public middle school in Beijing, China. Since the subjects of this investigation were drawn from the middle school population, we believe that the results of the study can provide readers with a general picture of the extent of bullying in this Beijing public middle school.

Research Question 1 in this study investigate the extent of bullying experienced by grades 7, 8 and 9 students in an urban middle school in Beijing, China. The findings showed that about 74% of grade 7, 63% of grade 8, and 54% of grade 9 students reported that they have been bullied either sometimes or frequently. About 39% of grade 7, 41% of grade 8, and 31 % of grade 9 students also reported that they have bullied other students sometimes or frequently. These results suggest that a much higher percentage of students are likely to be involved in bullying behaviour. In other words, bullying appears to be a normal behaviour among the sample of middle school students surveyed in this study. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which reported that there were fewer bullies than victims of bullying (Qiao et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012; Chan and Wong, 2015).
The results also show that the incidence of bullying generally declined from grade 7 to grade 9. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies (Banks, 1997; Chen & Avi Astor, 2009; Seals & Yong, 2003; Veloo, 2012), where it has been found that, as students grew older, the incidence of bullying declined.

The results obtained from this study also show that boys were bullied and were involved in bullying others more frequently than girls. This finding is consistent with findings reported elsewhere, where it has been found that boys are more likely than girls to get involved in bullying (Lai et al., 2008; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Qiao et al., 2009).

The second research question explored if there were any differences in the nature of bullying experienced by boys and girls. The findings from this study show that the frequency and nature of bullying experienced by boys and girls differ. The rank order correlation of 0.57, \( p < 0.05 \) indicate that the ranking of the frequency of bullying by boys and girls were different.

The final research question explored in this paper was where bullying normally takes place and who would the victims of bullying confide in after they have been bullied. The results obtained from this study show the locations where bullying commonly took place. About 30% of students reported that they were bullied in the classroom when the teacher was not presented. Other locations where students were bullied include, ‘travelling to school’ (7%), ‘hallways’ (6%), and ‘online’ (3%). It is also interesting to note that only about 11% of the students reported that they had experienced bullying in the ‘playground’. The result contradicts the findings from other studies where it was found that the playground was the place where most students experience bullying (Hughes, Middleton, & Marshall, 2009; Seals & Yong, 2003).

Why is bullying more frequent in the urban classrooms in China than in the playground. One possible reason is that students in an urban middle school in the Beijing of China do not spend as much time in the school playground as their counterparts do in the West, because during recess and lunch breaks, many students tend to remain in their classroom. Although students have lunch in school, it is inside the classroom where they eat their lunch. It is also worth noting that bullying took place during periods in the classroom when the teacher was not present. It is important for school management to ensure that teachers get to their classes on time and classes are not left without teachers during recess periods and lunch breaks. Olweus has argued that teachers’ supervision is the most effective single ways of decreasing bullying in schools (Olweus, 1993).

In this study, it was found that a ‘close friend’ (30%) is the person to whom most students would report to when bullied. The next most popular individual students would report to when bullied is the class teacher (15%), followed by the ‘parent’ (8%) and the ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ (2%). This result are similar to the findings reported elsewhere (Smith, 2012b; Veloo, 2012), where it has been found that the close friends were the person to whom most students would report the incidence of bullying. It may be that, as students grow older, and experience the transition from childhood into adolescents, it would be easier to talk to their close friends rather than their parents.

5. Conclusion
The results obtained from this study show that bullying did occur in the urban middle school in Beijing. Specifically, the study found that there were fewer bullies than victims. The incidence of bullying declined from grade 7 to grade 9. The frequency and nature of bullying experienced by boys and girls were different. Boys were being bullied and were involved in bullying more frequently than girls.

References


