

Research on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Research from Norway:

The first evaluation of the OBPP took place in Bergen, Norway and targeted 2,500 students in Grades 5-8 over a period of two-and-a-half years between 1983 and 1985. Researchers used an extended selection cohorts design, in which same-age students could be compared across time. This strong quasi-experimental design has been used in many of the subsequent studies involving the OBPP (Olweus, 2005; Olweus & Limber, 2010a, 2010b).

Findings from this initial study revealed:

- Marked reductions in students' self-reports of being bullied (reductions of 62% after 8 months and 64% after 20 months) and bullying others (reductions of 33% after 8 months and 53% after 20 months);
- Reductions in teachers' and students' ratings of bullying among students in the classroom (Olweus 1991, 1997; Olweus & Limber, 2010b, 2010a).
- Positive program effects for students' self-reported antisocial behavior (involvement in vandalism, theft, and truancy) and students' perceptions of positive school climate (Olweus, 1991, 1993; Olweus & Limber, 2010b, 2010a).
- Fidelity of program implementation was related to program outcomes (Olweus & Alsaker, 1991; Olweus & Kallestad, 2010).

Six follow-up evaluations of the OBPP have taken place in Norway, involving more than 20,000 students from more than 150 schools.

- Findings from students in grades 4-7 have revealed consistently positive program effects (Olweus & Limber, 2010b).
- Of particular importance is a 5-year follow-up study of 14 schools in Oslo, which included approximately 3,000 students at each of 5 assessment points between October 2001 and October 2006. The study revealed relative reductions in self-reports of victimization of 40%, and relative reductions of self-reported bullying of 51%.

Research from the U.S.

Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of the OBPP in diverse settings in the U.S.

South Carolina. The first evaluation of the OBPP in the United States involved students in elementary and middle schools in South Carolina in the mid-1990s (Limber, Nation, Tracy, Melton, & Flerx, 2004; Melton et al., 1998; Olweus & Limber, 2010). After 7 months of implementation of the OBPP, significant Time x Group (intervention versus comparison schools) interactions were found for students' reports of bullying others. Researchers observed a 16% decrease in rates of bullying among students in intervention schools and a 12% increase in

bullying among students in comparison schools, resulting in a 28% relative reduction of bullying others in intervention versus comparison schools. Researchers also documented significant differences between intervention and control schools in self-reported delinquency, vandalism, school misbehavior, and sanctions for school misbehavior. There were no significant program effects for students' reports of being bullied.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The OBPP was evaluated in six large public elementary and middle schools in Philadelphia over the course of four years (Black & Jackson, 2007). Evaluators used an observational measure of Bullying Incident Density and found that bullying incident density decreased 45% over the course of the four years of the project, from 65 incidents per 100 student hours, to 36 incidents.

Washington. Bauer, Lozano, and Rivara (2007) evaluated the OBPP using a nonrandomized control study with middle school students in 7 intervention and 3 control schools in the state of Washington. Researchers assessed students' self-reports of involvement in and perceptions of bullying. They reported positive program effects regarding students' perceptions that other students actively intervened in bullying incidents. They also observed significant program effects for physical and relational victimization among White students (with relative decreases of 37% and 28% respectively).

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A collaboration of researchers has recently conducted the largest evaluation of the OBPP to date in the United States (Limber, Olweus, Breivik, & Wang, 2013). Analyses included more than 72,000 students at baseline assessment, who were in grades 3-11 and were drawn from 214 schools, representing 5 different cohorts. Findings revealed positive and systematic effects of the OBPP on students' reports of being bullied and bullying others in nearly all grades, and among boys and girls. Program effects for being bullied and bullying others were systematically larger the longer the program was implemented. Positive program effects related to students' attitudes about bullying (e.g., how they feel when a student is being bullied) and their reports of others' actions to address bullying (e.g., reports of how much teachers/fellow students have done to address bullying) were also found. The design of the study allowed researchers to examine possible history effects. Findings clearly suggested that the observed positive changes over time were due to the effects of the OBPP.

Meta-Analysis

Several research teams have synthesized evaluation results across various bullying prevention programs or conducted meta-analyses of programs. The meta-analysis by Ttofi and Farrington (Ttofi et al., 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009) is widely recognized as the most comprehensive and rigorous to date on bullying prevention programs. A conclusion from this meta-analysis is that whole-school programs can be successful but also that there are great variations in the effects of different programs. The authors concluded that that programs "inspired by the work of Dan Olweus worked best" (Ttofi et al., 2008, p. 69) and that future efforts should be "grounded in the successful Olweus programme" (p. 72).

References & Resources

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