

## Maximizing Positive Impact of Bystanders to Curb School Bullying

Hanjing Wang<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Sendelta, Shenzhen, Guangdong, China

\*Corresponding author: 1915741885@qq.com

**Keywords:** School bullying, Bystander Effect, Secondary Schools, Bullies, Victims, Intervention, Prevention.

**Abstract:** As a common phenomenon globally, campus bullying incidents bring different degrees of negative effects on the victims, especially the physical and psychological traumas of various levels. The bullying occurs on campus can be divided into five different roles: the bully, the victim, the bystander, the indifferent bystander (the outsider), and the active bystander (the protection of the bullied). This paper focuses on the analysis of the bystanders, whose behavior can directly affect campus bullying. When bystanders are on the side of the victim, bullying is relatively weak. On the contrary, if they are only indifferent outsiders, the intensity of bullying will be significantly increased. Therefore, the intervention of bystanders plays a decisive role in campus bullying. In this context, this paper tries to explore how to maximize the positive impacts of bystanders in school bullying. Based on the study of bystander behavior in foreign campus bullying incidents, this review introduces the factors influencing school bullying events, the classification of bystanders, and bystanders' role in eliminating school bullying incidents. Meanwhile, the factors influencing bystanders' behaviors are analyzed and positively intervened, to maximize the positive influence of bystanders in school bullying incidents in the urban suburb.

### 1. Introduction

School bullying is a popular topic nowadays. An increasing number of researchers have paid great attention to school bullying, which threatens the well-being of students and the learning environment at schools. However, most teachers, school administrators, and those concerned about the development of the next generation have been only focusing on bullies and victims. Research has shown that students, who are nonparticipating observers in school bullying, should be considered a protecting factor that can influence victims and bullies in various manners, offering access to reduce school bullying [1]. Based on the Bureau of Education in the US (or any other country), about 60% of bystanders in the secondary schools acknowledge that they can stop school bullying. However, there are still lots of bystanders who refuse to help the victims for various reasons, which compromises schools' social environment. In this regard, educators must understand bystanders and explain how bystanders influence school bullying and why some might not want to speak up for the victims. The goal of this study is to maximize the advantages of bystanders to stop bullying.

#### 1.1 Demystifying school bullying

School bullying is unwanted and aggressive behavior among children in the educational setting. That involves a power imbalance, which can be manifested in physical or verbal attacks, resistance, and exclusion in interpersonal interaction and may also be similar to the ridicule, comment, or ridicule of body parts. It has brought indescribable harm to teenagers in primary and secondary schools. Nonetheless, the definition of school bullying is still quite vague in China [2], where schools may not clarify and implement the subsequent disciplinary actions of school bullying to the stakeholders. In contrast, western education, such as The United States and England, has described what school bullying is and the consequent disciplinary approaches towards the bullies and the victims.

Three main factors are associated with school bullying, including the upbringing that a person

received in their family, campus culture, and information explosion on social media [3]. Before we set foot in society after schooling, the development of personality and behavior has been mostly affected by their family upbringing. In this regard, those who exhibit aggressive behavior are most likely to have families where the parents used to be ill-prepared to educate their children. The marital relationship of their parents is rife with conflicts. They may have witnessed similar verbal or physical violence between their parents in childhood, thereby not knowing how they ought to treat others.

The explosion of information pervades among various forms of social media, among which the influence of misleading information is becoming increasingly rampant. Movies, books, magazines, and TV programs that promote superstition, violence, and obscenity have emerged. The rapid development of the Internet makes these unhealthy cultures spread faster. However, most teenagers are immature, impulsive, and likely to imitate what these cultural products present without any discrimination.

The third is the influence of campus culture. According to the relevant survey, 44.4% of teenage misbehaviors come from their academic performance [4]. Because of repeated setbacks that students face, some students lose interest in learning and may act astray from the school expectations. They do not care about the school rules at all. Their loyalty towards their friends, which forms a small community, may result in a power imbalance because those outside of the subculture may be bullied. Therefore, the seeds of campus bullying naturally began to breed. Under this circumstance, bystanders may act as the protector for the victims. They have the capabilities of influencing victims and bullies in various manners, reducing the occurrence of injuries resulting from the school bullying.

## **1.2 Who Are Bystanders?**

Generally speaking, bystanders are "individuals who are on the scene but not involved in the event." [5] When it comes to school bullying, bystanders refer to students who "have witnessed the process of bullying on campus" [6]. Although they do not intend to abuse others, some students may scream or laugh out loud to provoke the bully to initiate aggressive behavior; others may not choose to step in. Therefore, the passiveness of these bystanders sends a signal to the bully that there will not be any foreseeable consequence if they hurt others, leading them to feel less guilty.

Salmivalli [7] maintained that some students might choose to take the initiative to keep campus bullying in check and protect the victims or at least exhibit the willingness to help them. However, the reality might be disappointing. Ziwei [8] and other researchers concluded that around 75.74% of the respondents from their survey were the onlookers, and 33.9% were victims of the school bullying. If they felt intimidated by being picked out or hurt, they might not want to speak for the victims, even though they might have thought about intervening it once. Franzoni [9] echoed that students regarded as bystanders reported that they were reluctant to intervene for fear of retaliation. When being interviewed after the bullying had taken place, some students assumed that their intervention might have exacerbated the conflicts, or they might become victimized themselves at the same time. Others doubted that their fellows or even teachers would be supportive even if they might feel intensely sympathetic to the victims and wanted to stop the bullying at the moment [8]. Schools administrators and teachers should be able to identify students who are more sympathetic and likely to help victims at first and consider how to support them to be a crucial part of the solution to appease school bullying.

## **2. The Influence of Bystanders on the Campus Bullying**

### **2.1 Negative Impact of Bystanders in School Bullying**

The Bystander Effect refers to that nonparticipants do not help and support victims when bullying occurs, which is in line with the two types of bystanders that are aforementioned. The more passive bystanders are, the less likely that bullying will stop, given there's no other intervention available [10]. The likelihood of nonparticipants actively responding to school bullying depends upon how obligated they feel to speak up for the vulnerable, especially since the active intervention in bullying is altruistic at the cost of personal safety. Yet, other nonparticipants' presence implies that the more people who

share moral obligations, the less likely each individual will help, when no one has more authority than others. Most of them may only acquiesce in such anarchism, waiting for other students to stop bullying from escalating immediately. For example, a group of students saw that some classmates were harassing another conspicuously vulnerable student. Some kids might want to help but thought that others would volunteer when some unintentional comments or provocation occurred, aggravating the situation right away. Therefore, it turned out that no one has ever stood out to stop bullying. In this case, teenagers tend not to be confrontational insofar as they stay away from the conflicts. Such non-confrontational conformity is what we call the Bystander Effect. Research has shown that bystanders might make the situation of campus bullying worse, and abusers might even feel more excited when bystanders exist.

## **2.2 Positive Impact of Bystanders in School Bullying**

Bystanders may have a positive impact on bullying. Jenkins and Fredrick [11] discovered that students with more peer and teacher support are more likely to exhibit pro-social behavior in bullying situations. When the bullied and bystanders have an excellent peer relationship, they tend to make more protective behaviors. In contrast, if the bullied and bystanders have a bad peer relationship, they will choose to shy away from the tension and act aloof. In addition, the harmonious teacher-student relationship will lead to more positive bystander behavior.

## **3. Strengthen Bystander Intervention and Prevention of School Bullying**

In the background of the market economy, people tend to pay more attention to their own economic interests and ignore the collective or other people's interests. When personal interests conflict with the collective interests, some people will choose to sacrifice the collective interests to protect their own interests; even under the socialist market economy, some people will choose to sacrifice the collective interests to protect their own interests [12]. The popularity of egoism has seriously affected society's smooth operation, corroded people's hearts, and destroyed good interpersonal relations. The interpersonal relationship maintained by interest relationship will collapse more quickly when faced with interest choice. Campus bullying mostly occurs among junior high school students, and junior high school students have not yet reached the age of criminal responsibility in most cases. Even if the perpetrator has reached the age of 14 to 16, the general bullying and beating will not lead to the victim's death or severe injury. Therefore, according to the existing law, the criminal responsibility of the bully cannot be investigated. This will give campus bully a dangerous hint and let other students' interests be damaged, and their safety cannot be protected. Because of the above reasons, people generally believe that bystanders are passive bystanders and have only negative effects on bullying.

Salmivalli [7] pointed out that although bullying is wrong behavior, and even some bystanders hope that their own actions can prevent bullying, most bystanders will not help the victims. Bystanders do not want to intervene in the bullying incident because they are afraid to become the target of being bullied, or they dare not help because other bystanders are not involved. Whether other factors lead to the difference of bystander's cognition and actual reaction behavior is also one of the most critical links in bystander research of campus bullying.

Due to society's opening, students are more and more exposed to society; it is easy to see and happen in society as a reference for their own behavior. The society can establish a consensus on "bullying" through mass media, public opinion, and other forms: bullying events or behaviors are not right. It is not appropriate to cause verbal or physical harm to others. Social group norms can inhibit the occurrence of bullying to a certain extent, change the bystander's cognition and affect their intervention behavior.

### **3.1 What Governments Can Do**

The government should penalize school bullying and its stakeholders to varying degrees, including perpetrators of school bullying, schools, and families that fail to fulfill educational obligations. The protection to bystanders and incentives to reward their altruistic behaviors should be

created to maximize their positive impact on school bullying intervention. Schools should establish a compulsory reporting system in response to school bullying promptly. Moreover, the Bureau of Education at different levels can assign special personnel to supervise and evaluate the law's implementation regarding the intervention and prevention of school bullying [13].

The intervention and prevention of school bullying should be a joint effort by multiple government departments and non-governmental organizations, ranging from collecting evidence for the violations that have occurred, providing victims, bystanders and bullies with medical and psychological counseling, and reinforcing the correctional system for teenagers who bully others [14]. Only if school bullying is deemed a strong predictor of future delinquency can school bully be effectively curbed.

### **3.2 What Schools and Teachers Can Do**

Schools should create an emergency system responsive to school bullying, given the specific demographics of students and surrounding communities. The administrations in charge of this system must take the lead to design the long-term prevention for school bullying for the schools as well. Teachers and school staff are supposed to be aware of school bullying prevention's responsibilities through workshops and lectures offered as part of professional development. The ability to handle campus bullying should indicate the year-end assessment towards the staff and teachers [15]. Besides, schools can set up stations where teachers and students and even outside social workers can cooperate, helping student victims reduce their psychological injury and conduct emotional counseling [14]. The targeted groups of this social endeavor at school should be the students in need, whether victims, bullies, or bystanders in school bullying. Adhering to the core concepts of Sympathy, Equality, Respect, Acceptance, and Trust, social workers and school volunteers of school bullying prevention are required to be alert to the unfair treatment that students have, thus improving their adaptability through interaction with parents, schools, and communities after having a grasp of their family background and life experiences [13].

### **3.3 What Families and Student Bystanders Can Do**

Student bystanders should try to turn their passiveness into active participation in responding to school bullying once they realize how important it is to be responsible members who can benefit their communities. Parents should take the initiative to guide their children to make correct choices, enhancing children's sense of moral responsibility [16]. Starting from family education, parents can make an effort to create a healthy culture for their children by refining the daily routine. If children learn how their parents treat others and experience the pleasure of dedication, they would be more conscious of giving back to society. The active participation in social practices will help teenagers cultivate a sense of social responsibility and sympathy, so they may be more likely to speak for the victims who are vulnerable to the interpersonal relationships among them [17].

## **4. Conclusion**

Bystanders have both positive and negative effects on school bullying. Their reactions to school bullying are contingent upon their personal experience and the situational factors of the incident. Research in or outside of Asia on bystanders' behaviors in the face of campus bullying can help us understand when student bystanders may choose to prevent campus bullying from reducing school bullying. Future research should keep investigating how exactly bystanders will affect campus bullying in different cultural environments..

## **References**

- [1] Song, Y. (2014). China Youth Study: A review of studies on bystanders of school violence, 000(3):94-98
- [2] Yen C F , Kim Y S , Tang T C , et al. Factor structure, reliability, and validity of the Chinese version of the School Bullying Experience Questionnaire[J]. The Kaohsiung journal of medical ences,

2012, 28(9):500-505.

[3] Bowes L , Arseneault L , Maughan B , et al. School, Neighborhood, and Family Factors Are Associated With Children's Bullying Involvement: A Nationally Representative Longitudinal Study[J]. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2009, 48(5):545-553.

[4] Weller S C , Orr D P . IS THERE A CULTURE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AMONG ADOLESCENTS?[J]. *Pediatric Research*.

[5] Christina, Salmivalli, Marinus, Voeten, &Elisa. (2011). Bystanders matter: associations between reinforcing, defending, and the frequency of bullying behavior in classrooms. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*.

[6] Axford N , Bjornstad G , Clarkson S , et al. The effectiveness of the KiVa bullying prevention program in Wales, UK: results from a pragmatic cluster randomised controlled trial[J]. *Prevention*, 2020, 21(5):615-626.

[7] Salmivalli C , Lagerspetz K , Bjorkqvist K , et al. Bullying as a group process: Participant roles and their relations to social status within the group[J]. *Aggressive Behavior*, 2010, 22(April 2016):1-15.

[8] Ziwei, Z, Chaohua, L, Xiangyang, Z., Qiguo, L. , Chunyan, Y. U. , & Xiaowen, T. U. , et al. (2019). Relationship between different roles in campus bullying and depression. *Chinese Journal of School Health*.

[9] Franzoni, B. L (2008). The role of bystanders in students' perception of bullying and sense of safety. *Journal of School Psychology*.

[10] Fischer, P., Krueger, J. I., Greitemeyer, T. , Vogrincic, C. , Kastenmüller, Andreas, & Frey, D. , et al. (2011). The bystander-effect: a meta-analytic review on bystander intervention in dangerous and non-dangerous emergencies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 517-37.

[11] Jenkins L N , Fredrick S S . Social Capital and Bystander Behavior in Bullying: Internalizing Problems as a Barrier to Prosocial Intervention[J]. *J Youth Adolesc*, 2017, 46(4):757-771.

[12] Barton, E. A. (2003). *Bully Prevention: Tips and Strategies for School Leaders and Classroom Teachers*. SkyLight Professional Development, 1900 East Lake Avenue, Glenview,

[13] Farrington, E. L(2014). Bullying on campus: how to identify, prevent, resolve it. *Women in Higher Education*, 19(3), 8-9.

[14] Huajin, L., & University, C, (2017). Causes of campus bullying in primary and secondary schools and countermeasures. *Education and Teaching Research*.

[15] Tsang, S. K. M., Hui, E. K. P & Law, B. C. M, (2011). Bystander position taking in school bullying: the role of positive identity, self-efficacy, and self-determination. *entificworldjournal*, 11(1), 2278-2286.

[16] Lee, & Joseph. (2009). Students under verbal attack on way to campus. *Times Educational Supplement*.

[17] Hollis, L. P. (2017). The need for anti-bullying policies on campus: an argument for improving gender and race relations in higher education. *Journal of Black Sexuality & Relationships*, 3(3), 29-46.