

## Behavioral Modification Theories and Bullying Prevention: A Review Article

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### Abstract:

Bullying is defined as an intentional, systematic, and unwanted aggressive behavior that is characterized by an imbalance of power between bullies and victims and is repeated multiple times. Bullying has been linked with increased risks of insistent problems, such as low self-esteem, reduced school achievement, emotional problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health complications, self-harm and even suicide. Bullying has been hypothesized as a cognitive-behavioral phenomenon. Cognitive behavioral methods as school wide education programs are used widely in reducing peer bullying. Behavior modification is commonly thought of as the method of changing patterns of human behavior using various motivational practices such as the Health Belief Model, The Theory of Planned Behavior, The Transtheoretical model and The Social Cognitive Theory.

**Key words:** *Behavioral Modification Theories, school Bullying, Antibullying interventions*

### Introduction:

Researchers from various disciplines in the social and health sciences have attempted to develop theories of health behavior that can be used to encourage healthy change and inform intervention design and implementation. Although these intervention theories and approaches share underlying similarities, they differ greatly in terms of behavioral foci, focal constructs, and processes and stages of change <sup>(1)</sup>.

### **The Health Belief Model (HBM)**

The Health Belief Model (HBM) consists of six constructs: <sup>(2)</sup>

*Perceived susceptibility* is a person's subjective assessment of the likelihood of contracting an illness or disease. A person's feelings of personal vulnerability to an illness or disease vary widely.

*Perceived severity* is a person's feelings about the seriousness of contracting an illness or disease. A person's feelings of severity vary widely, and when evaluating severity, he or she frequently considers both medical consequences and social consequences (e.g., family life, social relationships).

*Perceived benefits* - A person's perception of the efficacy of various actions available to reduce the threat of illness or disease is based on careful consideration and assessment of both perceived susceptibility and perceived benefit.

*Perceived barriers* - These are a person's perceptions of the barriers to carrying out a recommended health action. The individual weighs the effectiveness of the actions against perceptions that they may be costly, dangerous, unpleasant, or time-consuming.

*Cue to action* - This is the stimulus that is required to initiate the decision-making process to accept a recommended health action. These cues can be internal or external.

*Self-efficacy* is a person's belief in his or her own ability to successfully perform a behavior.

### **The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB): <sup>(3)</sup>**

This is made up of six constructs that represent a person's actual control over their behavior.

*Attitudes*: The degree to which a person evaluates the behavior of interest favorably or unfavorably. It entails thinking about the consequences of performing the behavior.

*Behavioral intention* - This refers to the motivational factors that influence a given behavior, with the stronger the intention to perform the behavior, the more likely it will be performed.

*Subjective norms* - This is the belief that many people approve or disapprove of the behavior. It refers to a person's beliefs about whether peers and important people in his or her life believe he or she should engage in the behavior.

*Social norms* - Social norms are considered normative, or standard codes of behavior, in a group of people.

*Perceived power* - This refers to the perceived presence of factors that may facilitate performance of a behavior. Perceived power contributes to a person's perceived behavioral control over each of those factors.

*Perceived behavioral control* - This refers to a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest across situations and actions.

**The Transtheoretical model (TTM):** <sup>(2)</sup>

This is an intentional change model that focuses on the individual's decision-making.

*Precontemplation* - People at this stage do not intend to act soon (within the next 6 months). People are frequently unaware that their actions are harmful or have negative consequences.

*Contemplation* – At this stage, people are planning to begin the healthy behavior as soon as possible (within the next six months). When people become aware that their behavior may be problematic, they give both the advantages and disadvantages of changing their behavior equal consideration. People who are in this stage are prepared to act within the next 30 days.

*Action* -At this stage, people have recently changed their behavior (within the last six months), and they intend to keep doing so.

*Maintenance* – At this stage, people have maintained their behavior change for a while (more than 6 months) and plan to continue doing so. This stage's participants strive to avoid relapsing into earlier phases.

*Termination* - At this point, a person is certain they won't relapse and has no desire to engage in their unhealthy behaviors.

**The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT):** <sup>(4)</sup>

This considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behavior, as well as the social environment in which the behavior is performed.

*Reciprocal Determinism* -This refers to the dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person (individual with a set of learned experiences), the environment (external social context), and behavior (responses to stimuli to achieve goals).

*Behavioral Capability* - This refers to a person's actual ability to perform a behavior through essential knowledge and skills.

*Observational Learning* establishes that people can witness and observe another person's behavior and then replicate it. This is frequently demonstrated by "modelling" of behaviors.

*Reinforcements* are the internal or external responses to a person's behavior that influence the likelihood of the behavior continuing or discontinuing.

*Expectations* are the expected consequences of a person's behavior. Before engaging in a behavior, people anticipate the consequences of their actions, and these anticipated consequences can influence the successful completion of the behavior. Expectations are largely influenced by prior experience.

*Self-efficacy* refers to a person's level of confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform a behavior. A person's specific capabilities and other individual factors, as well as environmental factors (barriers and facilitators), all influence self-efficacy.

### **Theoretical Linkage of Bullying**

#### **Self-Blame**

One of the important mechanisms for the psychological effects of bullying is how the victims of bullying understand the reason for their plight. Behavioral self-blame (I was in the wrong place at the wrong time) indicates that it is unstable (the harassment is not likely to occur again) and controllable (there are responses to prevent upcoming harassment). On the other hand, Characterological self-blame is stable, internal, reflecting on the self and suggesting failure to prevent upcoming harassment. Persons who make characterological self-blaming attributions for negative outcomes feel hopeless, helpless, cope poorly, and are more depressed than persons who make attributions to their behavior<sup>(5)</sup>.

#### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory recommends that there is a continuous interaction between the social environment (witnessing others' behaviors), internal stimuli (cognitions and feelings) and behaviors. So, the interventions should be based on cognitive working (skills that encourage problem solving approaches) and social working (encourage prosocial behaviors) for reducing bullying involvement<sup>(6)</sup>.

The fundamental principle of social cognitive theory of bullying is learning by seeing. No one will inevitably turn out to be a bully. Children learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of others. Human behaviors are determined by a combined relationship between personal, behavioral and environmental determinants<sup>(7)</sup>.

#### **Dominance Theory of Bullying**

People take part in bullying others to get social position, obtainable resources and to be popular in society. Occasionally, individuals who have some leadership characteristics may take advantage of

their charisma and talent for dominance others as a means of achieving social position or prestige and creating domination. In the classroom a few students may begin bullying less powerful students. Moreover, they may show bossy behavior believing that others may venerate them and tend to create alliance with the bullies being heads of them <sup>(8)</sup>.

### **Humiliation Theory**

Humiliation is defined as the act of humiliating or underestimating others. It happens when a powerful individual publicly discloses the insufficiency of a weak individual. Therefore, it is important to understand humiliation as it badly impacts on the victim and the surrounding. Humiliation can cause depression, low self-esteem, social cohesion restriction and impairment of the school environment. Also, humiliation violates the principle of essential human rights of being respected or dignified <sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Developmental Theory**

Developmental Theory signifies that bullying arises in early childhood when children begin to state themselves to form their social power. In the initial period, verbal and indirect types of bullying are more common than direct and physical bullying. Older children are more likely to respond positively to problem-solving opportunities which need sophisticated indebtedness. So, the developmental approach is useful in providing direction and guidance to solve bully and victim's behaviors <sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Organization Cultural Theory**

Bullying behaviors are not merely inherited, but they are attained from the community, society, or school. School culture can either encourage or stop bullying behavior. So, efforts to minimize or stop bullying behaviors in school require changing school environment and culture <sup>(9)</sup>.

### **Theory of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice theory highlights repairing harm triggered by criminal activities through creating mediation and reunion between victims and the society. At the same time, it attempts to change bullies and moving them from doing violent activities to healthy individuals <sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Theory of Response to Group and peer Pressure**

Bullying is frequently assumed to be a group activity and associated with peer- pressure in a societal background. This approach of social framework is related to the activities and attitudes of the entire school community <sup>(7)</sup>.

## Genetic Predisposition to Mental Health Outcomes and Bullying

There is no gene for being an offender or a victim of bullying behavior. Pathological or nonpathological outcomes as being the victim or perpetrator of bullying differ from person to another person's genetic susceptibility. Genetic susceptibility can make some individuals more sensitive to harmful environmental influences in a complex manner <sup>(9)</sup>.

### Antibullying interventions in schools

Research has shown that social support from family, friends/peers, teachers, and school is one of the most important predictors of bullying victimization and a major barrier preventing bullying, victimization, and violence <sup>(10)</sup>.

School support is an important protective factor against bullying victimization. A positive school climate is associated with a lower incidence of bullying victimization <sup>(11)</sup>.

Bullying prevention through building a caring, comprehensive, respectful and reassuring school climate has become a crucial target of school improvement efforts <sup>(12)</sup>. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) have been developed in the United States is one of the leading programs for improving school climate <sup>(12)</sup>.

It is essential to utilize school counselors, psychologists, and additional community referral systems to be responsible for students involved in bullying <sup>(13)</sup>.

According to research, half of all lifetimes mental health disorders begin in childhood or adolescence. It is advocated that mental health prevention and awareness interventions be targeted at these critical developmental stages, and that interventions be embedded in school settings, where the majority of children are present, in order to improve children's social and emotional well-being <sup>(14)</sup>.

To avoid early crime, suicidal behavior, internalizing symptoms, and other mental health problems, effective anti-bullying programs should be targeted at various areas of influence (individual students, parents, classes, entire schools). Raising student awareness about the role of the entire group has an impact on reducing bullying, and improving antibullying norms and responses within classrooms is critical <sup>(15)</sup>.

The effectiveness of whole-school (students, staff, their relationships, and climate) approaches has been studied in several contexts. One of the most widely used anti-bullying prevention programs in the United States, Olweus' Bullying Prevention Program, has consistently shown positive effects on bullying perpetration and victimization. Studies on Olweus, however, have only shown transient

changes in behavior and have not identified the program elements driving these changes. The School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program, which is successful at addressing behavioral issues in elementary school students, was evaluated, and it was discovered that it was only marginally successful at enhancing school climate in middle school <sup>(16)</sup>.

The strength of another comprehensive positive youth development programs is their specific focus on youths' developmental milestones that recognizes the diverse and interactive nature of individual and environmental influences, both positive and negative. By building competencies (e.g., moral, social), increasing healthy bonding with peers and adults, and intervening for at least nine months or longer <sup>(17)</sup>.

The Restorative Practices Intervention improves behavior and increases connectedness through ecological systems theory where individual behavior is determined by multiple causes and is susceptible to multiple influences ranging from microsystems (e.g., peers) to macrosystems (e.g., social conditions) and psychology of affect theory through three psychological mechanisms: (1) It maximizes positive affect through proactive practices which are intended to foster stronger bonds and relationships among youth; (2) It reduces negative affect by providing responsive practices that allow offenders to accept public responsibility for their actions and reintegrate into normal community life; and (3) It encourages free expression of emotion through training in techniques such as affective statements and questions <sup>(18)</sup>.

The key components of bullying prevention programs were the intensity (the number of hours) and duration (the number of days/months). Additionally, it is crucial that educators make their anti-bullying viewpoints known to students <sup>(19)</sup>. Instead of reinforcing bullies' behavior, the KiVa antibullying program developed in Finland focuses on increasing bystanders' awareness, empathy, as well as self-efficacy to assist victimized peers <sup>(15)</sup>.

The KiVa antibullying program is based on the theoretical principle: If bystanders act differently, bullies' motivation may be reduced as they will no longer have the benefits of being in charge of the group <sup>(20)</sup>.

### **Actions to reduce bullying**

As the United Nations specialized agency for education focuses on the prevention and response to bullying, with the goal of ensuring the right to education of all children and young people in safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments (SDG Target 4.a). The three work areas for assisting international initiatives to combat bullying are as follows: presenting the most recent and

complete global evidence on bullying in schools, promoting the development and implementation of evidence-based policies as well as advocating with Member States to strengthen national educational sector responses to bullying and violence in schools, assuming a leadership role in advancing the measurement of bullying and violence in schools within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Target 4.a) <sup>(21)</sup>.

In school bullying, bystanders might be unwilling to intervene as they are afraid of retaliation. So, effective intervention strategies are needed to learn bystanders the true role in preventing bullying behavior <sup>(22)</sup>.

### **Five possible bystander roles**

- Bully empowerment: actively encourage the bully through laughing, cheering, joining in, or passively supporting the bully by providing an audience, especially if adding an indirect stamp of agreement by smiling.
- Bully disempowerment: prevent, criticize, reduce, discourage, or shame the bully or bully actions (but not clearly supporting the victim).
- Victim empowerment: socially or psychologically support the victim by supporting, defending, or telling a teacher.
- Victim disempowerment: prevent, criticize, reduce, discourage, or shame the victim or victim's actions (but not clearly supporting the bully).
- Ignore the situation: do nothing, pay no attention to the situation, or just decide not to get involved or threaten oneself.

Cognitive-behavioral interventions (CBI) are focused on an individual's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. The Target Bullying Intervention Program intended to decrease aggression and impulsive actions through recognizing the cognitive processes and mental health problems (depression, anxiety, cognitive alterations, self-concept, school climate perceptions, and bullying participation) <sup>(23)</sup>.

Two findings are confirmed by interventions that take advantage of the most recent developments noted in the review (e.g., multidimensional procedures, a social-ecological perspective to highlight bystanders and the classroom climate, and a multilevel perspective to concentrate on classroom-level procedures). First, peer victimization can be significantly reduced in classroom environments that are highly supportive, pro-defense, and anti-bullying. Second, such a climate can be created by teachers



with professional training. When bullies are prevented from elevating their status by harming classmates, peer victimization decreases<sup>(22)</sup>.

### **Frameworks of bullying Prevention**

#### **International Response to Bullying<sup>(21)</sup>**

The United Nations, civil society, and the private sector have combined their strengths and resources as part of several new international partnerships and cooperative campaigns to boost the momentum for combating violence against children, including bullying in schools, on a global scale. UNESCO actively participates in the ongoing international partnerships, as examples:

*Safe to Learn campaign:* It is a five-year global campaign to end school violence. The campaign was launched in January 2019 at the Education World Forum and includes the Secretariat of Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's. The campaign's goals are to strengthen monitoring of all forms of violence, including bullying in schools, increase political commitments to adopting and implementing laws, policies, and increase parental, teacher, student, and community leader awareness, and encourage their participation.

*2019 World Anti-Bullying Forum:* The Forum will increase the body of knowledge regarding bullying, strengthen the connections between the various academic fields, and disseminate information to more professionals, researchers, and decision-makers globally.

A conceptual framework describing the key components of a comprehensive and effective education sector response to school violence and bullying, including six elements: 1) Legislation, policies, and educational reforms. 2) Physical and psychological safety in the school environment. 3) Curriculum, instruction, and instruction. 4) Mechanisms for reporting, counselling and support, and referral. 5) Collaboration, involvement, and empowerment. 6) Evidence: monitoring as well as school response evaluation.

### **Governmental and non- Governmental Responsibility**

The first national campaign in Egypt (I'm against bullying) calling for the abolition of peer-to-peer violence was launched under the auspices of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOETE), with funding from the European Union (EU), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Ministry of education is fully supporting this significant national campaign and stressed the campaign's goal is to raise awareness of the risks of bullying among students, teachers, and their communities to identify and address bullying<sup>(24)</sup>.

South Australian bullying prevention explanatory model develops coordinated and consistent responses between governmental and non-governmental organizations that seek to improve the social ties between a child or young person and their community <sup>(25)</sup>.

### **Stakeholders Responsibilities**

Anti-bullying initiatives that are comprehensive, effective, and long-lasting call for a multi-sectoral strategy involving all stakeholders, including those in the education sector as well as law enforcement, social services, and child protection agencies, a multi-sectoral approach that is inclusive and context sensitive. As well as, the school community involving the school management team, teachers, other school staff, students and their families, and community members connected to the school, are all key actors in the anti-bullying policy's implementation. Also, Academics and researchers must play a significant role in enhancing the evidence base for developing more potent strategies, methodologies, and tools to combat bullying and advancing policy-makers' and practitioners' understanding of bullying <sup>(21)</sup>.

### **The fundamentals of a successful anti-bullying program and overall bullying response <sup>(21)</sup>**

A review of best practices identified a few key principles of an effective anti-bullying policy and overall response to bullying:

*Rights-based with a "do no harm"* -The policy should priorities the rights, needs, safety, and protection of children.

*Evidence-based* - All anti-bullying policy measures, both international evidence on effective responses and national studies on the prevalence, nature, and consequences of bullying should be based on scientific evidence.

*Learner-centered* - An anti-bullying policy that is learner-centered addresses the various perspectives, needs, and experiences of all students.

*Inclusive* - The anti-bullying policy should consider the needs of all children, including marginalized or excluded groups, who are frequently more vulnerable to bullying.

*Participatory* - Children should be included as key participants and subject matter experts in the development of the anti-bullying policy as well as in the process of coming up with anti-bullying solutions .

*Gender-responsive and transformative* - The anti-bullying policy needs to be based on a thorough examination of gender and rights.

*Age differences* in bullying prevalence and how appropriate responses differ depending on the developmental stage of the children should be considered in policy.

*Context-specific* -The anti-bullying policy should be based on broader national and international legal and policy frameworks for eliminating violence against children. However, each country's situation and needs analysis should serve as the foundation for any proposed interventions.

### **Key components of an effective anti-bullying policy** <sup>(26)</sup>

**Safe school environment**, an efficient anti-bullying policy should stress the importance of every school providing a secure physical and psychological learning environment applying guidelines and standards.

**Learning, teaching, and curriculum**, this implies that the definition of bullying and the various types of bullying should be included in the policy so that teachers and other members of the school staff can recognize bullying incidents as soon as they happen and respond appropriately.

**Reporting instruments, counselling, and support services and referral**, support and referral mechanisms for other services such as health care, social protection, and law enforcement vary by country, but these mechanisms and services should always be easily accessible, child-sensitive, and confidential.

**Collaborations, participation, empowerment and evidence**, an effective anti-bullying strategy should enable inclusive partnerships that involve the entire education system at the national and district levels, as well as the entire school community at the school level, including parents. It should promote collaboration, linkages, and synergies with non-education sectors and civil society organizations concerned with the rights, development, and well-being of children and young people. Empowering and meaningful participation of students, particularly bystanders, in anti-bullying initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation of school bullying responses.

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