Assessment of Bullying: A Review of Methods and Instruments

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Childhood bullying has become recognized as a significant, pervasive form of school violence. Because of its deleterious effect on both victims' and bullies' current and future functioning, it is imperative that school personnel such as counselors engage in assessment techniques as the 1st step in a coordinated, systemic antibullying effort. The authors discuss multiple methods and instruments to use in assessing bullying in schools and provide guidelines for counselors in choosing the appropriate measurement for their needs.

School violence has become a pervasive problem for our nation. Littleton, Colorado; Jonesboro, Arkansas; West Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Edinboro, Pennsylvania; and Springfield, Colorado, were relatively obscure small towns and cities until they became the site of a shocking episode of violence in which children killed children and teachers in school. To shed light on the cause of these incidents, the U.S. Secret Service interviewed 40 boys involved in school shootings and determined that many of these children were humiliated and harassed by peers over long periods of time (Simonovich & White Stack, 2000). Hence, a common thread in many of these episodes of school violence seems to be childhood bullying.

Bullying is a significant, pervasive form of school violence (Batsche, 1997). Olweus (1993), who is considered by many researchers to be the leading expert on peer victimization, offers a general definition of bullying that includes repeated exposure to negative actions by one or more victims over time. Olweus (1993) further defined a negative action as a purposeful attempt to injure or inflict discomfort on another, either through words, physical contact, gestures, or exclusion from a group. The portion of the definition that includes harassment conducted repeatedly and over time is designed to exclude occasional negative actions that are not perceived as being serious and may be directed toward one student on one occasion and toward another student on a different occasion. However, in certain circumstances, a single instance of serious victimization may be perceived as bullying (Olweus, 1993).

Three general forms of bullying have been delineated in the literature (Ross, 1996). Olweus (1993) first distinguished between direct and indirect bullying, later describing direct bullying as "relatively open attacks on a victim" (p. 10) and indirect bullying as a "form of social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group" (p. 10). Indirect bullying eventually was referred to in the literature as relational victimization and describes manipulation of relationships or friendships to inflict emotional pain on another, such as a group of peers retaliating against someone by ignoring her or him (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Finally, a further distinction was made in the form of a third category, direct verbal aggression, which consists of such behaviors as name-calling, shouting, abusing, and accusing (Björkqvist et al., 1992).

Research has identified bullying as being ongoing, unsolicited, and frequently not physically injurious (Hoover, Oliver, & Thompson, 1993; Olweus, 1993). Essentially, bullying is the process of establishing and maintaining social dominance through overt aggression and doing so in ways that victims are unable to deflect because of their lack of skills, their inability to effectively integrate with peers, or their inability to develop subgroups of peers (C. M. J. Arora & Thompson, 1987). Unfortunately, many children are bullied in schools. Estimates vary regarding how many children are bullied, but research has suggested that at least 15% to 20% of all students will experience bullying during their school career (Batsche, 1997). Children who are chronically victimized by bullies may experience such short-term prob-
lems as physical and psychological distress, difficulty in concentrating, and school phobia (Bernstein & Watson, 1997) and such long-term problems as an inability to initiate and maintain successful interpersonal relationships with members of the opposite sex (Gillmartin, 1987), higher levels of depression, and having a more negative self-concept than do peers who have not been bullied (Olweus, 1993).

Although the victims of bullies are clearly at risk for short- and long-term maladjustment after incidents of peer victimization, children who bully are also vulnerable to myriad future problems. Bullies learn to become empowered over others in an unhealthy manner that is unlikely to be functional in later childhood. Bullies also tend to develop maladaptive social skills that are predictive of poor adult adjustment and are likely to perpetuate the transmission of impaired social skills to the next generation. Furthermore, those children who demonstrate peer aggression in childhood are more likely to engage in such behaviors as domestic violence, criminality, and substance abuse (Eron, Huemann, Dubow, Romanoff, & Yarmel, 1987; Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1996).

Evidence-based practice (i.e., practices that have been empirically endorsed) for addressing childhood bullying emphasizes a comprehensive approach of assessment, prevention, and intervention (Batsche, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1996). The first step in establishing a bullying prevention program is to develop an effective assessment program. Although few studies have examined the assessment practices of school counselors and few, if any, have examined the role of counselors in the assessment of bullying, one study has suggested that although school counselors recognize the usefulness of assessment, they actually use relatively few assessment instruments (Giordano & Schiebert, 1997). Thus, it follows that counselors may benefit from additional information regarding the assessment of childhood bullying, particularly if their districts are prioritizing bullying prevention and intervention as one means to counter the problem of school violence. Hence, the purpose of this article is to provide counselors with a concise overview of the various bullying assessment methods that can be used in schools as a primary step in addressing childhood bullying.

This article first addresses various assessment methods that can be used. Included is a discussion of observations, interviews, sociometric measures, surveys, questionnaires, teacher rating scales, and self-report measures. Each method is described, and research briefly reviews its reliability and validity is addressed. Finally, implications for counselors are discussed.

ASSessment METHODS

Observations

Unstructured observations. Possibly the simplest method of assessing bullying is through unstructured observations. In using this approach, the observer selects a time and location in which bullying is likely to occur. Often, informal conversations with teachers or students may provide helpful information about a likely context for bullying. Probable settings for bullying include the playground, the lunchroom, the restroom, buses, locker rooms, and physical education classes. The observer should attempt to be unobtrusive as possible and try to vary times and contexts to gain a realistic picture of bullying at the school. Aspects of the process of peer victimization can be assessed, such as social status, social isolation, and social withdrawal (Evans & Eder, 1993; Kinney, 1993; Merton, 1996).

Structured observations. Structured observation methods may also be used to gather information concerning problems of bullies and their victims. In one study, researchers compared the frequency, duration, and nature of direct, indirect, physical, and verbal bullying on playgrounds and in classrooms (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). Boulton (1993) used a structured observation method devised by Altman (1974) called “focal individual sampling” to observe children’s bullying behavior on the playground at school. Researchers have also used contrived playgroups to examine the behavioral patterns contributing to chronic peer victimization in middle childhood, examining play, conversation, aggression, and bullying with satisfactory interrater reliability probes (Schwarz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993).

Observational assessment has both strengths and weaknesses. Direct observational methods can be used to provide unbiased analyses of focal participants’ behavior in certain circumstances, and such methods are objective when definitions are clearly articulated and interrater reliability is established. Observations are inexpensive, typically use personnel and materials that school districts already have, and can potentially yield much information about participants, settings, forms, and frequency of bullying. However, observational measures do not usually correlate well over time, perhaps because of limited samples of observations and situational specificity of behavior. These weaknesses can be minimized by sampling behavior in multiple settings over long periods of time (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

However, direct observation methods may not measure the true prevalence and magnitude of bullying behavior because bullying is often covert (Colvin, Tobin, Beard, Hagan, & Sprague, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Direct observations and teachers’ observations reflect a public (normative) perspective and cannot be conducted in some school settings, such as restrooms or locker rooms, where bullying tends to occur. In these situations, Pellegrini (1996) suggested the use of direct observational methods or diaries in which children could record behavior on standardized forms at predetermined intervals, thereby offering a private perspective of bullying. The reliability and validity of such diaries is increased when participants record their behavior using specific vocabulary or categories at predetermined sampling intervals (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Interviews. Interviews have been used to establish the incidence of bullying behavior, its impact on student development, and the effectiveness of antibullying interventions. Qualitative reports of victimization have been used with female middle school students to develop a comprehensive...
interview of victimization experiences, including details or characteristics of bullying events, perceptions of relationships with the perpetrators, and emotional and behavioral coping responses (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gwenn, 2001). When interviews are conducted by personnel outside of a school system, students may be less concerned about revealing sensitive information to school administrators and may be better able to discuss the motivation of students who demonstrate antisocial behavior as well as the effectiveness of antibullying intervention strategies. Moreover, in an interview, school children have an opportunity to speak about issues regarding bullying that may not be typically addressed in other formal assessment measures (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000). The student responses to interviews can be transcribed and coded so that researchers may examine whatever aspect of bullying they wish.

One limitation of qualitative assessment techniques such as interviewing is that validity may be compromised because of the self-selected nature of the data. However, information from qualitative measures may be used to supplement and validate responses to quantitative measures (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). However, the foremost weakness associated with interviewing is the considerable time investment necessary to meet with students in order to adequately sample the entire student population. In addition, different interviewers may elicit a variety of responses from children if interrater reliability is not maintained. Interviews and observations can be subjective and vulnerable to bias because of the preconceptions or viewpoints of the interviewers or observers.

Sociometric Procedures, Questionnaires, and Surveys

Another means of extracting information concerning the participants in peer victimization is by examining children’s social status among peers. As documented by several researchers, social status within the classroom can be assessed through various sociometric procedures. For example, Dodge, Coie, Pettit, and Price (1990) conducted a study in which children received “liking” and “disliking” nominations from their peers. Subsequently, these nominations were summed and standardized within each grade level. Boivin and Hymel (1997) followed a similar procedure, using a picture nomination sociometric device in which children were asked to identify three “liked most” students and three “liked least” students in three situations: playing together, inviting other children to a birthday party, and sitting next to others on the bus on a class trip.

Bowers, Smith, and Binney (1994) also used a picture sociometric method in which children were provided with a photograph of each of their classmates and asked to separate the photographs into two piles: those who bully others and those who do not bully others. The children were then asked to do the same for those children who are bullied and those who do not get bullied. Boulton and Smith (1994) used a peer nomination technique but gathered information through interviewing each child in the classroom. The researchers had a photograph for each child in the classroom and had youngsters point to children who matched certain behavioral characteristics, including bully and victim categories.

In another study, students were presented with a peer nomination questionnaire that included four items assessing direct aggression, one item measuring indirect aggression, and seven items representing prosocial behavior. Students were asked to name three girls and three boys from their class who behaved in accordance with each item (Paksaalhti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000).

Sociometric procedures and peer assessment measures are appropriate for use when planning whole-class interventions. Sociometric and peer assessment devices can be as simple as having children pick other students’ photographs and matching them to behavioral descriptors, or it can be as complex as bully and victim questionnaires embedded in self-perception scales. Research has suggested that children are adept at identifying bullies and victims in the classroom, and reliability estimates have been satisfactory in studies that have reported psychometric qualities of sociometric procedures and peer assessment measures (Paksaalhti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000).

However, some researchers have asserted that the best way of examining the prevalence of bullying behavior is through student surveys (Colvin et al., 1998; Olweus, 1993). Questionnaires and surveys are useful when planning whole-school interventions because they yield a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time. The weakness in using these forms of assessment is that they often require a greater time investment, may cost more, and may require greater manpower than some of the simpler measurement approaches.

Teacher Ratings

Information provided by teachers may also be valuable in identifying bullies and victims in the classroom. Typically, teachers are given a list of students’ names and are asked to identify students who are bullies or are victims, or they are asked to identify which children match certain behavioral descriptors. Although Olweus (1993) and Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, and King (1982) have suggested confidence in the accuracy of teacher nominations, other researchers believe that teachers may grossly underestimate the amount of bullying that actually takes place at school (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Hazler, Carney, Green, Powell, and Jolly (1997) have suggested that teachers may have difficulty discriminating between bullying and teasing and victimization and play, and Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) have reported that teacher questionnaire responses may reflect biases. Teachers’ ratings are the result of their own experiences with students in particular settings, and sampling bias may occur if teachers observe students in a limited number of settings. However, bias can be minimized when adults spend long periods of time observing children in a variety of settings, and their objectivity is maintained through retraining and reliability checks (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Information from peers and teachers generally correlates well and is predictive of long-term outcomes, possibly because of the shared
phenomenon of multiple and varied experiences (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Teacher rating scales are appropriate to use when data regarding bullying need to be gathered quickly and easily. Teachers can assess large numbers of students rapidly, the cost of surveying teachers is minimal, and responses among and between teachers can be easily compared. However, because of differing opinions regarding the accuracy of teacher nominations in identifying bullies and victims in the classroom, it is probably best to use teacher questionnaires in conjunction with either sociometric devices or interviews and observations.

**Self-Report**

In addition to peer and teacher ratings, some researchers assess bullying by questioning the actual participant of bully-victim conflicts. Self-report measures do not require a great deal of time, necessitate little manpower, and are inexpensive. However, in one study, Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988) reported that there was a small group of children in their study who described themselves as being extremely victimized by their peers or by their teacher when others did not perceive them to be. As a consequence, Perry et al. (1988) cautioned against using self-report measures when there is a discrepancy between self-perception and the perception of others. However, if children feel that they are bullied, it is certainly reasonable to assume that they could also be targeted for intervention to help them deal with this perception. There are other weaknesses associated with self-report measures. Most important, self-reports of aggression are usually underestimates of actual behavior because perpetrators, in the interest of maintaining social desirability, are often reluctant to identify themselves (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). However, self-ratings and peer nominations should be similar when rating observable behavior such as public displays of aggression (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

**Instruments**

**Bullying-Behaviour Scale (BBC).** Austin and Joseph (1996) developed the BBC to subtly assess direct bully/victim problems at school by embedding it within the Harter’s Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC). For a more thorough discussion of the SPPC, please see reviews by Harter (1985) and Granleese and Joseph (1993, 1994). The BBC consists of six forced-choice items, three representations of negative physical actions and three depictions of negative verbal actions. Internal consistency reliability of the BBC was satisfactory, and boys were found to score higher than girls on this measure, suggesting that analyses should be conducted separately for boys and girls. This instrument does not measure relational victimization, which is a weakness of the measure. However, we believe that the Social Acceptance subscale of the SPPC can indirectly assess this domain. No validity data are reported for the BBC. Hence, further research is necessary, particularly in regard to this instrument’s concurrent validity with self, peer, and teacher reports.

**Name Calling Survey (NCS).** The NCS (Embry, 1995) can be used to measure the extent to which children experience being called names. The instrument was originally developed and administered to students in the first through sixth grades at a public school in northern Alabama. The final version of the NCS includes 35 statements that ask children about names they have been called in school, to which they answer yes or no. Higher scores indicate being called names more often (Embry & Luzzo, 1996). Both Embry (1995) and Dennis (1999) reported moderate to high internal consistency reliability levels for this instrument. Content validity was established by a review of the instrument that was done by practicing school counselors and counselor educators (Dennis, 1999).

**Life in School booklet.** This booklet was developed by C. M. J. Arora and Thompson (1987) for the purposes of allowing children in the United Kingdom to develop their own definition of bullying. The researchers reported that 50% or more of the children identified the following six behaviors as being consistent with bullying: "tried to hurt me, threatened to hurt me, demanded money from me, tried to break something that belonged to me, tried to hit me, and tried to kick me" (C. M. J. Arora & Thompson, 1987, p. 112; Kalliotis, 2000). The authors of the Life in School booklet noted that a definite advantage of the instrument is that bullying is never mentioned specifically. Although the original checklist was designed for higher school students, several revisions have been completed so that it can be used for younger students (T. Arora, 1999). Reliability and validity data, however, are not reported for this measure.

**Olweus’s Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ).** The OBVQ (Olweus, 1983) is an inventory that was designed to assess bully/victim problems in schools. This instrument begins with a definition of bullying and investigates the frequency and types of bullying, the location where the bullying takes place, who does the bullying, how often children report bullying to teachers or their family, and if the teacher intervenes, what he or she does to stop the bullying. Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) reported strong psychometric properties for the OBVQ, which is moderately correlated with peer nomination (Ross, 1996) and is one of the best methods for establishing the incidence of bullying with children who are middle-school age and older (Austin & Joseph, 1996).

**Peer Beliefs Inventory (PBI).** The PBI is a measure designed to assess children’s general beliefs about their school peers. Six questions in the measure refer to prosocial characteristics about peers, whereas six other statements refer to antisocial characteristics about peers (Rabiner, Keane, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 1993). The antisocial items are reverse scored, and final tallies range from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating more positive beliefs about peers (Embry & Luzzo, 1996). As a measure of peer beliefs, the PBI is reported to have adequate internal consistency reliability and construct validity (the latter as determined through factor analysis; Embry, 1995; Rabiner et al., 1993). Rabiner et al. reported that children were found to believe similar things.
about the peers they observed, and their ratings were moderately stable over time.

Peer Nomination Inventory (PNI). The PNI (Wiggins & Winder, 1961) is an instrument designed to enable children to identify classmates who match particular behavior descriptors. Researchers have developed a modified PNI to assess bullying that contains 26 test items, 7 of which represent victimization, both verbal and physical, and 7 of which measure aggression (Perry et al., 1988; Perry, Williard, & Perry, 1990). When the PNI is used, boys and girls each receive a same-sex form. Children place an X beneath each classmate’s name that matches the behavior described in the item and may nominate as many children for each item as they wish. Victimization and Aggression scores for an individual child are determined by calculating and then adding the percentage of same-sex classmates who checked his or her name on each victimization or aggression item (Perry et al., 1988). High reliability was found for the Victimization subscale, and the validity of this instrument was established through correlation with teacher assessments of victimization and correlation with self-ratings of victimization (Perry et al., 1988). One limitation identified was that teachers vary in their thresholds for perceiving victimization, which makes comparison between teachers’ nominations difficult. The authors of this instrument suggest that using multiple teachers who know the children well and averaging their nominations for each child will enhance the stability of teacher estimates of victimization (Perry et al., 1988).

Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ). Rigby and Slee (1993) developed the PRQ, a 20-item standardized measurement with 6 items representative of the tendency to bully others, 6 items measuring the tendency to be victimized, 4 items measuring prosocial behavior, and 4 items as filler. These scales are reported to be factorially distinct from each other and to have adequate internal consistency reliability (Rigby & Slee, 1993).

The scales were later separated into three distinct measures, and a number of single-item measures (taken from the OBVQ) were included to provide validity assessments for the three domains (Rigby, 1993). The authors reported that significant correlations between self-reports and peer nominations for the three scales attest to the validity of the instrument (Rigby & Slee, 1995). However, because it is a self-report measure, peer and/or teacher ratings should also be used to validate the self-report data.

Peer-Victimisation Scale (PVS). Neary and Joseph (1994) developed a measure, the PVS, that could be embedded in Harter’s (1985) SPPC for the purposes of reducing the distinction of the items. The PVS contains six forced-choice items, three of which represent physical victimization and three of which refer to verbal victimization. The six-item PVS was found to discriminate between bullied and nonbullied children as determined through self-report and peer reports, correlated satisfactorily with self-report measures and peer measures, and, in a later study, was found to have satisfactory internal consistency reliability (Austin & Joseph, 1996). High scores on the scale are associated with depressed perceptions of self-worth and competence and also with depression, offering evidence of the scale’s construct validity.

In a later study, the PVS was expanded to assess multiple forms of bullying and was referred to as the Multidimensional PVS (Mynard & Joseph, 2000). Four main factors were identified from the Multidimensional PVS: Physical Victimization, Verbal Victimization, Social Manipulation, and Attacks on Property, all of which were found to have significant correlations with self-reports of being bullied (Mynard & Joseph, 2000). The fourth factor, attacks on property, is a dimension that has not previously been identified or investigated in the bullying literature, although the authors reported that this is a common type of victimization, particularly among male students (Mynard & Joseph, 2000). Further research is necessary to validate this newly identified form of bullying.

Social Experience Questionnaire (SEQ). Crick and Grotzer (1996) developed the SEQ-Self Report and the SEQ-Peer Report in order to measure relational aggression apart from other kinds of bullying. Both versions of the SEQ contain three subscales, each with five items, that measure Relational Victimization (an assessment of how often peers attempt or threaten to harm peer relationship), Overt Victimization (an assessment of how often peers threaten a child’s well-being), and Prosocial Attention (an assessment of how often peers demonstrate caring acts; Crick & Bigbee, 1998). In the self-report measure, students report how often they have experienced behaviors using a 5-point Likert scale, with larger numbers representing greater experience and higher frequency of victimization. Similarly, in the peer report measure, children are provided with a class roster and are asked to nominate up to three classmates of either gender who match each item descriptor. The nominations are then summed and standardized within each classroom (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Grotzer, 1995). In both the self-report and the peer report measures, the three subscales yielded moderate to high reliability levels, and the self-report and the peer reports of relational and overt victimization were significantly correlated for both boys and girls (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Crick & Bigbee, 1998). The SEQ is unique in its ability to measure relational and overt victimization, although both verbal and physical bullying are not considered separately but are combined in the Overt Victimization subscale. This instrument may be particularly useful in assessing bullying among female students because many instruments focus on types of peer victimization that are common to male students, such as physical bullying (Crick & Bigbee, 1998).

Self-Rating Questionnaire on Aggressive Behavior (SQAB). The SQAB (Lindeman, Harakka, & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1997) is a measure that represents two interpersonal conflict situations that adolescents would likely experience. The first situation depicts overt aggression, whereas the second scenario focuses on indirect aggression. In previous research, the problem-solving alternatives in these two scenarios yielded three factors (Aggressive Problem-Solving Strategies, Prosocial Problem-Solving Strategies, and Withdrawal Prob-
lem Solving Strategies; Lindeman et al., 1997). Six items of the SQAB represent aggressive behavior, while four items measure prosocial qualities. Students' behavioral decisions are assessed using a 5-point Likert scale in which larger numbers represent a greater likelihood to engage in a particular behavior. Reliability for the Aggressive Behavior subscale was strong, whereas moderate reliability was noted for the prosocial behavior domain (Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2002).

In another study using the SQAB, students were presented with a different version of the questionnaire after they had read the first conflict scenario representing direct aggression. This version included seven items assessing aggressive behavioral responses and seven items measuring prosocial responses. Then, after the students had read the second scenario on indirect aggression, they were presented with four items that measured aggressive behavioral responses, three items that assessed prosocial responses, and two withdrawal responses. In total, there were three items measuring direct aggression and four items measuring indirect aggression. Reliability estimates were calculated using Cronbach’s alpha and were found to be relatively strong for direct aggression and moderate for indirect aggression, with a moderate between-scale correlation (Pakaluk & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000). This measure is not appropriate for use with younger children, however, because of the formal operational cognitive developmental level that is required (Piaget, 1954).

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS**

Ideally, bullying assessment should be a systemic effort that is carefully planned and implemented by a team of professionals including administrators, counselors, teachers, and psychologists. Issues of time, manpower, and cost must be considered when planning and establishing a bully assessment program. Once a program is established, it is best to pilot test it prior to full implementation.

Research offers counselors guidelines for the development of effective bullying assessment programs. First, research has suggested that bullying assessment techniques provide the most accurate information when conducted over a long period of time (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Hence, programs should ideally be ongoing and provide a means of routinely collecting data at set time intervals. Second, a variety of school personnel, including counselors, should be responsible for assessing bullying. Furthermore, all involved personnel should be adequately and frequently trained and should conduct assessments in a variety of settings. Third, it is important to use multiple assessment methods to increase the validity of the data obtained. Use of multiple assessors combined with the use of multiple assessment methods reduces the likelihood that the data gathered will be a function of either the data gatherer or the assessment method used to gather the data. Fourth, before bullying assessment techniques are selected, the technical adequacy of each assessment technique should be analyzed. Generally, only methods and techniques with demonstrated technical adequacy should be used. Last, a decision must be made about how the information gathered will be used. Such a decision may influence the choice of assessment methods.

If the intent of the counselor is to merely identify and target possible or actual bullies and victims for individual intervention programs, then observations, interviews, teacher questionnaires, and self-report measures can be simple, effective means to gather this information. However, if a school district is planning to implement a systemic intervention program, the OBQV is probably the best assessment choice available for middle school and high school age children. It has been thoroughly researched, is reliable and valid, and is comprehensive in its examination of the problem of bullying (Ahmad & Smith, 1990; Austin & Joseph, 1996; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Ross, 1996). For elementary school children, because there is no other instrument that approaches the thorough, well-researched OBQV, a multimethod approach to assessing bullying is probably warranted. The SEQ should be considered if the intent of the counselor is to work with female students. The SEQ is the only instrument that measures relational aggression, the type of bullying most often seen among girls and female adolescents. The SEQ has moderate to high reliability, although further research is required to establish whether the SEQ validly discriminates between relational victimization and other forms of bullying behavior.

Counselors who work in private practice or community mental health agencies are somewhat disadvantaged because of their inability to assess large groups of children. Typically, counselors in such settings would work with only one child or possibly a few children who were experiencing the problem of bullying, and thus they have only a small sample size when assessment is required. As a first step, an interview with the child involved in bullying would be helpful in obtaining the child’s perceptions of the problem. If the counselor feels that further information is required, a self-report measure, an interview with the child’s teacher or parents, or an observation conducted when and where the child is likely to be victimized, such as recess on the playground or lunch in the lunchroom, may provide additional clarification. A child’s perceptions of the bullying problem would probably be sufficient for the counselor’s therapeutic treatment plan, but further information may be required to develop effective antibullying interventions designed for use outside the counselor’s office.

Issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status should be considered prior to implementation of a bullying assessment program. Findings from research have suggested that bullying occurs equally among students of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds and may also be a cause for conflict between students of varied socioeconomic status (Sian, Callaghan, Glisov, Lockhart, & Rawson, 1994; Sweeting & West, 2001). To address the potential problems of racism and stereotyping in the selection, use, and interpretation of bullying assessment, professionals involved should be careful to represent students’ race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background in an assessment plan.

It is also important to consider the role of parents when assessing bullying behavior. Ethical issues may arise regard-
ing children’s rights to privacy and parents’ rights to review assessment results regarding their children. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 allows parents the right to review and inspect school records, which would include assessment information about bullying. Moreover, Zingaro (1988) has explained that regardless of a child’s age, his or her right to privacy should be compromised only in the most extreme circumstances. For these reasons, parents should be informed and included in decision making whenever possible when bullying assessment is conducted, and children’s confidentiality should be strictly maintained unless individuals have a legitimate need to know for treatment or intervention purposes.

In conclusion, assessment of bullying is a necessary first step in a comprehensive antibullying effort. For interventions to be effective, school personnel must understand the problem of bullying in their system. Information about those involved in bullying problems, the location where bullying occurs, how frequently bullying takes place, and the response of educators to problems of bullies and their victims is critical and must be gathered before effective interventions can be planned. Although the field of bullying assessment is in its infancy and further research regarding instrumentation is needed, there seem to be a sufficient number of bullying assessment methods available to allow counselors to comfortably choose an approach to meet the needs of their school system or clients.

REFERENCES


