

Thematic Synthesis of Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Their Anti-Bullying Training

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

On average one in four K-12 students, in both public and private schools, experiences school violence, or bullying, in the United States (US); and in schools across the globe. Bullying comprises repetitive in-person and virtual actions causing physical and psychological harm, that result in the imposition of the bully's will. Bullies' use of violence masks internal conflicts; bullies excuse their actions on gender, ethnic, sexual, and socioeconomic markers. Since 2014 there have been over 50 "violent deaths," including homicides and suicides, on US school grounds. During the 2015-2016 school year, public middle school students reported being bullied (and many of them on a daily basis), at a rate significantly higher than high schoolers, and almost thrice the rate of elementary school students.

INTRODUCTION

On average one in four K-12 students, in both public and private schools, experiences school violence, or bullying, in the United States (US); and in schools across the globe ^[1-3]. Bullying comprises repetitive in-person and virtual actions causing physical and psychological harm, that result in the imposition of the bully's will ^[4]. Bullies' use of violence masks internal conflicts; bullies excuse their actions on gender, ethnic, sexual, and socioeconomic markers. Since 2014 there have been over 50 "violent deaths," including homicides and suicides, on US school grounds ^[2,5]. During the 2015-2016 school year, public middle school students reported being bullied (and many of them on a daily basis), at a rate significantly higher than high schoolers, and almost thrice the rate of elementary school students ^[5,6].

Students, regardless of age, need guidance in addressing issues of violence and depend on adult intervention to resolve conflict [7]. Teachers are seen as first responders, for they are often the first adults to receive notice of bullying [7]. Teachers' responses have a direct impact on the containment of violence; however, even when students inform adults, bullying can go unabated: placing students at higher risk for violence. As many teacher education programs tend to concentrate on content specific to the teachers' future teaching certification (teachers of English, Special Education teachers, math teachers), training specific to bullying takes on a lesser role. Therefore, teachers may be more apt to receive anti-bullying training in their schools through Professional Development (PD) opportunities.

Currently, no national legislation addresses the issue of teacher training, although the US Department of Education has called for teacher training in all local legislative initiatives. According to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, all states are to give educational agencies support in reducing bullying, document school safety efforts, and results, as well as "develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive...programs and activities" to address issues of school violence [8].

While administrators reported that during "the 2015–16 school year, about 93 percent of public schools...provided training on safety procedures (e.g., how to handle emergencies) for classroom teachers..., and 84 percent of schools reported providing training on classroom management" what the training entailed remains unclear [6]. It is also unclear whether anti-bullying programs deliver the benefits they claim to, as little is known about the training teachers receive or whether ongoing support exists after the initial training period [4,9]. It is paramount to understand how teachers perceive their ability to support their students if we are to help prepare teachers to address and reduce violence.

One of the few studies on teachers' perceptions of their anti-bullying training focused on student-teachers. The findings revealed that despite their anti-bullying training participants: (1) were unable to define bullying, (2) underestimated the severity and impact of bullying, (3) failed to address bullying or discounted offenses by claiming that actions were developmentally or gender-appropriate, (4) were more likely to refer students to other adults in the building, rather than address the problem in the classroom, (5) did not plan for the reintegration of students (usually the bully) into the classroom community in cases where students were suspended, (6) were unclear as to how to prevent bullying, and, (7) reported that the teacher-training was limited in scope and duration [7]. The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review of the literature to understand in-service middle school teachers' perceptions of their anti-bullying training. To that end, we sought to answer:

What are the findings in qualitative research, conducted between 2005 and 2018, regarding middle school teachers' perceptions of their anti-bullying training?

The goal was to present policymakers with a synthesis that highlights how training impacts teachers' ability to reduce school violence and identify practices that teachers consider effective in creating positive school climates. We defined effective training that (1) helped teachers identify physical and psychological bullying, as well as cyberbullying and sexual harassment, (2) understand the impact and consequences of bullying on the victim, bully, and bystanders, and (3) provided teachers with tools for preventing and addressing bullying and the reintegration of bullies and victims into the classroom community in the aftermath of bullying events.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The emergent fields of qualitative systematic research helps policymakers conserve resources, and gain an understanding of the “deluge of data” through the focused lens of the review study. In this way policymakers can attain new “interpretive constructs” on diverse data without overwhelming investments of time, funding, and human power ^[10-12].

Literature search and selection

A team member and specialist health and informatics research librarian guided the search process using the evidence-based screening guidelines presented in PRESS (Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies) to translate the research question into search queries, select Boolean operators, spelling, and syntax, as well as set limits and filters ^[13,14]. The following databases were deemed most relevant: ERIC-Education (EBSCO), Teacher Reference Center, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses A&I, to search for the following key terms:

Participants-teachers, educators, instructors,

Setting-middle schools, junior high schools, and 6th to 8th grades,

Subject-perceptions, attitudes, opinions, anti-bullying training, bullying prevention programs, school climate,

Methods-qualitative studies,

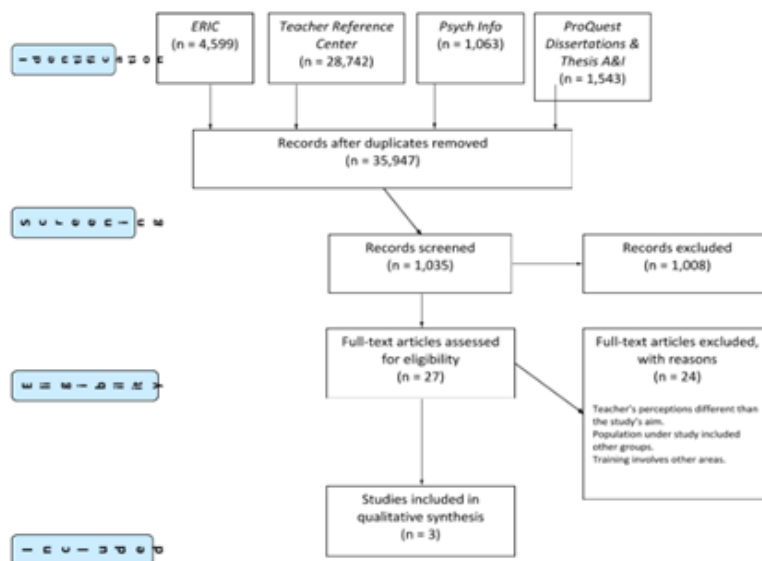
Publications-peer-reviewed journals, books, and grey literature,

Timeframe-2005 to 2018,

Languages-English, Spanish

The data collection started in late April and ended in July 2018. The two lead researchers created a search guide to standardize the process, and after removing duplicates, 35,947 records were identified. Using an abstract screening tool records were reduced to 1035 entries. Based on eligibility criteria a total of 1,008 records were excluded. The excluded studies did not represent qualitative research that focused on middle school teachers ^[12]. Of the resulting twenty-seven studies, twenty-four were excluded because (1) foci of teachers’ perceptions were different, (2) participants were not middle school teachers, and (3) training did not focus on teacher anti-bullying training. We examined the reference sections of the twenty-four studies, however, no additional records were identified. The final results were three dissertations written by doctoral students in the US. Combined, the three studies include the perspectives of twenty-six middle school teachers. We include a PRISMA flowchart of the search process in Figure 1 ^[15]. During this time, researchers met weekly to review their independent search process (documented in repository tables, one for each database), and addressed discrepancies until there was an agreement.

Figure 1. Data Reduction Process.



Confidence assessment

Each of the studies included in this review was rated for “(1) methodological limitations, (2) coherence, (3) adequacy... (4) Relevance”^[12,16], and (5) “dissemination bias”^[12]. We rated “each (category) individually” to ascertain each study’s strengths at the micro-level^[12]. The studies earned a collective “moderate” to “high confidence” rating and are considered “highly likely” and “likely” to represent participants’ perceptions of their anti-bullying training^[12]. We concluded that the studies’ methodologies were appropriate for answering the research questions and that the studies presented rich data to support the thematic synthesis. We used the CERQual, Confidence in Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research, guidelines, to determine confidence. We rated each category as “high confidence,” as it was our understanding that “each review finding should be seen as a reasonable representation of the phenomenon of interest unless there are factors that would weaken this assumption”^[12]. Researchers worked individually, coming together to share ratings and resolve any disagreements^[12].

Methodological limitations were addressed using the Critical Appraisal of Qualitative Research tool and in the selection of studies “grounded in participant perspectives”^[17-19]. Each reviewer independently scored the studies. We then discussed the scores as a group and resolved disagreements until attaining a consensus. Overall, we rated the studies cohesive in terms of the links among the purpose and the impetus for the study, the research questions, rationales for the use of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis, the use of theoretical frameworks, transparency in describing methods in data collection (i.e., participant selection, standards of ethics in research) and methodology for data analysis (coding processes and issues of trustworthiness), delineating a process that supported the studies’ inclusion^[19].

Coherence was supported as there was no evidence of “disconfirming data from the primary studies” [12]. Besides, the dissertations provided greater access to findings than is customary among published text, and thus richer data through which to understand the phenomenon [18]. Adequacy of data was reflected in the degree of direct quotes, from the twenty-six in-depth interviews, representing seventy-five percent of the data, and the use of first and second-order analysis conducted by the studies’ authors, including “author explanations” [18].

Dissemination bias or the “systematic distortion of the phenomenon of interest due to selective dissemination of qualitative studies or the findings of qualitative studies” was addressed by searching the grey literature and peer-reviewed articles, as did searching for Spanish and English language studies [10]. We also searched from an expansive period, 2005 to 2018, to present the most up-to-date research. Dissemination biases were also reduced since the authors did not report any external funding sources, nor did the authors use editors. However, one author used her dissertation findings to create an anti-bullying training program; but her findings were not included in this synthesis [10].

In reviewing the data, we found constancy among the results suggesting the unlikelihood of “distortion,” even though the three dissertations did not focus exclusively on the same research question that guides this synthesis [10,12]. Each study consistently reported on teachers’ perceptions of the limitations and benefits of, as well as, gaps in their anti-bullying training [10,12].

The researchers’ diversity (in terms of background and epistemological and ontological frameworks and research methodologies) enhanced this systematic review: two researchers are psychologists, one is a librarian studies specialist, and one is an education policy researcher and has taught in middle schools for over ten years [20]. Additionally, all researchers are bilingual, which allowed for the search to include both Spanish and English studies [20].

Author reflexivity

Dr. (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) epistemological and ontological assumptions are constructivist, which means she views data constructed as part of the participants’ worldviews, language, and culture. She has worked on qualitative research projects in education where her framework is critical pedagogy and constructivist pedagogy, which entail that learning and teaching are co-constructed through relationships and contextual factors.

Guided by a relativist epistemological framework and a critical realism ontological stance, Dr. (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) also views knowledge as socially constructed, ever-evolving, and context-bound [10-21]. She has a background in phenomenological interviews and critical theory analysis. She used her knowledge as a veteran middle school teacher to create the research question and identify search terms [22]; and, she minimized biases during the data synthesis process by comparing coding results with other researchers.

Dr. (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) view is discourse-based, where a social phenomenon is interpreted by the contextual and the cultural experiences of participants through the intersection of symbols, images, and textual devices. As a researcher and clinical psychologist, he has used such a framework in projects that focus on gender roles and their relationship to those seeking help in connection to health matters.

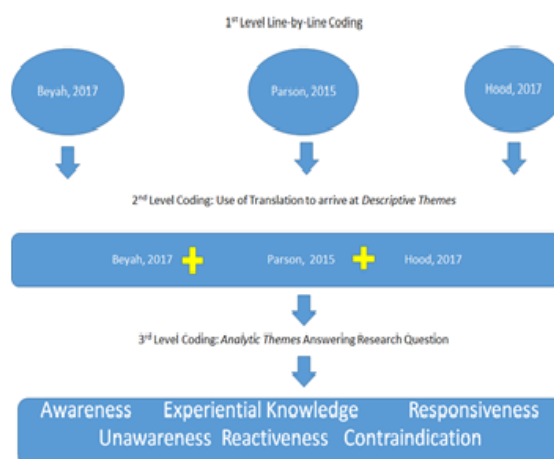
Professor (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) research philosophy is influenced by positivism and the use of empirical evidence. As a positivist, Professor (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) believes that data-driven research can objectively investigate students' learning experiences. Prof. (name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process) has examined college students' use of library resources for quantitative data-based research studies.

Data analysis

This “thematic synthesis,” based on guidelines proposed by Thomas and Harden [23], draws on “both meta-ethnography and grounded theory” [11], to understand teachers’ “perspectives and experiences” of their training [23]. Similar to meta-ethnography synthesis, thematic synthesis uses “third order interpretations’ to arrive at descriptive and analytical themes through reciprocal ‘translation’” of findings [11]. Translation allows researchers to “transfer ideas, concepts, and metaphors across different studies, (while careful to) preserve the structure of relationships between concepts within any given study” [24]. Thematic synthesis, like grounded theory, uses an inductive data analysis process that requires “constant comparison” of the data to generate new themes and maintain fidelity to the original studies [11].

We engaged in a cyclical process, alternating between individual coding and group analysis. Disagreements during this process were settled through discussions that led to consensus. First level coding entailed each researcher conducting “line-by-line” coding, working with one study at a time [10]. Two of the researchers used NVivo 12 Plus, while the third researcher coded *in vivo* [10]. As the process of data reduction took off, we deconstructed the research question into sub-questions which we used to translate the coded data, whenever possible, creating a new master text [11,23]. We then compiled a list of “free codes of findings (which were) organised into 'descriptive' themes, (and) further interpreted to yield 'analytical' themes” Figure 2 [11]. Six analytical themes emerged: awareness, experiential knowledge, responsiveness, unawareness, reactivity, and contraindication to describe the range of perspectives presented in the data.

Figure 2. Thematic Synthesis Process.

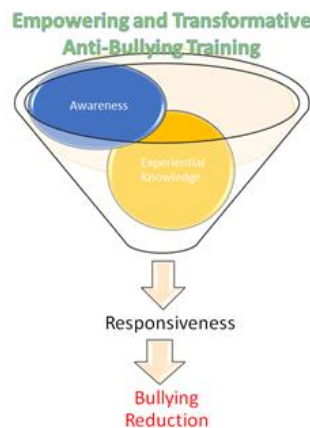


Awareness demonstrated teachers' understanding of bullying actions, particularly psychological bullying, such as cyberbullying. Awareness also included teachers' knowledge of how to respond to bullying incidents. Experiential knowledge resulted from teachers' self-studies and work-related experiences. Responsiveness refers to actions and practices that resulted in the prevention of violence and were used to address bullying. Unawareness, related to teachers' lack of knowledge and reactivity were teachers' reactions that did not defuse violence. Contraindication was evidenced in beliefs about bully development that do not reflect the literature on school violence.

Thematic synthesis

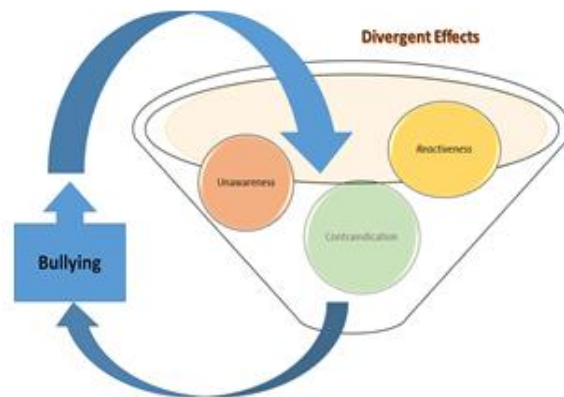
This study sought to inform policymakers about the effectiveness of anti-bullying training from the perspectives of middle school teachers. In this section, we reconstruct the data and present examples in support of each of the analytical themes. The interplay of anti-bullying training that empowered the teachers and increased their ability to identify, respond, and prevent bullying, is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Empowering and transformative anti-bullying training. *Note: ■ Awareness ■ Experiential Knowledge



Teachers also described their training as ineffective in helping them identify bullying or bullying incidents. The teachers felt disempowered, were not prone to action, and turned in-class problems over to administrators. Divergent training resulted in participants acquiring knowledge that ran counter to the accepted canon Figure 4. Anti-bullying training was either formal, provided by schools, district/state departments, undergraduate/graduate programs, and usually required for teacher licensing. Informal training referred to work-related experiences and self-selected studies, usually online. Although teachers' knowledge about bullying came from different sources, most attributed their knowledge to informal training opportunities.

Figure 4. Divergent Effects. *Note: Unawareness. Reactiveness. Contraindication.



Awareness: The teachers held a positive perspective about training when it led to their ability to identify of bullying. As a teacher in Beyah ^[25] indicated, “it was beneficial because a child can be bullied in my classroom and I may not be aware of the signs”. Two teachers in Parson’s study reported that “understanding the various ways that bullying could occur, as well as student jargon, was significant in developing a bully-free school environment”. Teachers also held a positive outlook for training that helped them learn that bullying included visible behaviors, such as shunning excluding and gossiping; and those not so visible, which were problematized, such as cyberbullying ^[25]. They also saw the benefits of training that helped them understand the value of teachers monitoring students’ behaviors inside the classroom as well as in public spaces, like hallways and staircases. Benefits were also seen in training strategies that helped them “build relationships with (all) students,” facilitating communication, so that students came to see teachers as caring and supportive ^[26]. Through authentic caring, teachers became “very perceptive of...students,” and helped them show care “inside and outside the classroom” ^[26]. Teachers described that their awareness helped them at home and school, claiming that “the skills that I learned in that class nailed it for me. It helped me as a parent, and it helped me as a teacher” ^[26].

Experiential knowledge: Teachers expressed a positive perspective about training that resulted from in-school experiences, self-studies, and informal discussions with other teachers ^[25]. Teachers stated that their classroom management skills came “from being in the classroom. What I’ve learned comes from working in the field. Until you get in the classroom, I don’t think you can really be taught anything about management” ^[27]. Experiential knowledge helped teachers move from theory to practice and understand, first-hand, the value of safety and how to set clear behavioral expectations. Practical experience brought them to the realization that: “the classroom should be one that is welcoming and relaxed so that the children feel comfortable and feel safe” ^[26]. Teachers also took time for self-studies using books and online information to supplement gaps in their training: learning about the severity of cyberbullying, that it is “real, that it’s serious, that the suicide rate is high because of it, and that we really need to pay close attention and nip it in the bud” ^[26].

Responsiveness: Teachers’ positive perspectives included training that helped them respond to, and thereby prevent and address bullying through teacher-centered, student-centered and community-centered practices.

Teachers who instituted teacher-centered practices provided students with bullying definitions and informed students of their schools' anti-bullying policies and disciplinary codes. In teacher-centered classrooms, behavioral expectations were established on the first day of school and teachers greeted students with "rules on the board" [26]. One teacher described that ninety percent of the students followed the class rules, a testimony that teacher control was an effective deterrent to bullying. Teachers also gave "feedback" on an ongoing basis, letting students know if they were meeting behavioral and academic benchmarks. Monitoring helped teachers identify changes in students' behavior and quickly respond for "if something (did not) seem right (teachers would) talk with the student (for) a few minutes...before (sending them) to their next class" [26]. The timely intervention helped de-escalate violence. Schoolwide teacher-centered practices were strengthened through ongoing team meetings, where staff shared information about the status and implementation of bullying preventive practices.

Student-centered practices focused on creating opportunities for students to self-regulate their behaviors and build "comradery" [26]. Teachers in Parson [27] spoke of the impact of peer relationships in preventing incidents of cyberbullying. Teachers built collegial bonds within student groups through collaborative activities that helped students get to know each other. These activities created a framework for students to be vulnerable and ask questions without fear of ridicule, which in turn, helped students stay focused on academics: preventing off-task behaviors that may have led to bullying. Students became each other's support systems, and when negative behaviors surfaced, students let their peers know they were on the wrong track before teachers intervened. In this way, the bystander assumed an active role in preventing bullying.

Community-centered practices centered on the creation of partnerships with families and community organizations. According to [25], some of the teachers addressed bullying by "get (ting) parents involved in helping both the victim and bully to solve conflict". Teachers and parents learned to identify, prevent and address cyberbullying, with parents speaking with their children about bullying and the safe use of technology as well as monitoring technology use at home. Teachers also formed partnerships with community organizations, which according to a teacher in Beyah [25] "assign(ed) victims of bullying to mentors, (who were) helpful in improving self-esteem in two of my students". Despite their limited training, teachers took on an active role, monitoring students' behaviors, helping students practice self-awareness, and building community among students and stakeholders as they created safe spaces within their schools.

Unawareness: Teachers described how they remained unaware of school and district bullying policies; they saw themselves as first-responders sans the tools to reduce school violence. One teacher in Parson stated that "local teachers needed more PD on school bullying because it (is) becoming an escalating problem". Like other participants, one teacher claimed to be unaware of "all the signs that I need to know of somebody being bullied" [27]. Specifically, teachers saw the: "need to define what we're gonna consider bullying, and then have a structure set of responses to that – to how you're going to handle it" [27]. Another participant added, "I do think there is a need for teacher preparation. I think it would be valuable to know what the line is for teachers in both preventative and proactive steps" [27].

Teachers' negative views regarding their anti-bullying training outweighed the positive, reporting that they had sporadic or no training. A teacher stated: "two summer courses...were offered under (the) school system. And, I didn't really learn anything that would help me" [26]. Teachers did not describe how they remained unaware of school and district bullying policies, nor could they identify, address, or prevent bullying: unaware of "all the signs

that I need to know of somebody being bullied” [27]. Teachers knew their knowledge was outdated, and they were concerned that they might mistakenly overlook signs of bullying for they “often looked for old signs without knowing the new codes or language” [27]. As a teacher indicated in Parson, “I don’t know how to stop it, because I can’t see it”: particularly in the case of cyberbullying which occurs in a virtual space. There was also little understanding of the underlying causes, effects, and consequences of bullying as the training tended to focus on reporting protocols [26]. The dissertations, completed between 2015 and 2017, represent a gap of eight years within our search boundaries. Thus, our findings present a narrow to a narrower range than initially sought [10].

Reactiveness: Due to their limited training teachers reported that they felt “apprehensions about...managing school bullying [27] and their tendency were to be “reactive” “as opposed to being proactive,” acknowledging that their responses may result in underreporting of bullying [27]. Limited training also resulted in some teachers’ underestimating the importance of bullying, which might have also escalated violence. While they understood that the lack of “preparation (was in effect leading them) in the wrong direction” they saw few avenues for change [27].

Contraindication: Teachers reported that formal training helped them understand bullies’ profiles, even though this information could be biased from a mental health perspective. For example, one participant expressed that:

What I learned from that is, usually, a person that is a bully is a person that probably, somewhere in their childhood has been bullied themselves. Also, it may be a person that’s very, very, insecure and because big brother picks on him, or big sister picks on her and beats her up at home, and Mom never catches it, or Dad never catches it because if she tells then her bigger sister is going to hurt her more. Then that small sister may take that approach and become a bully [26].

While another teacher in Beyah described that a bully can sometimes demonstrate “a sense of despair,” or that he/she might have felt “unappreciated as a child” [25].

Teachers also described bullies as students who struggled academically and were often some of “the weakest students in (the) classroom,” angry and standoffish and demonstrated “a need to appear strong” [25]. Bullies’ self-image was valued as low or with a false sense of self-worth and superiority [25]. In terms of social relationships or interpersonal characteristics, bullies were seen as having “poor relationships with parents and few good friendships” [25].

Limited training may have decreased teachers’ understanding of their roles in the creation of a school culture that curtails violence. Some teachers may think that the lack of training diminishes their role and therefore, “schools should not expect (them) to...deal with such a serious problem. School administrators are (solely) responsible for reducing the number of bullying incidents, not teachers” [25]. This reliance on administrators may delay teachers’ responses to bullying incidents. Other teachers described the use of “reactive steps when prevention isn’t enough and bullying continues” [27]. However, the literature on bullying prevention highlights both the role of teachers and the use of positive reinforcements in reducing school violence.

LIMITATIONS

This systematic review presents search limitations, methodological limitations of the included studies, and limitations due to the authors’ epistemological and ontological assumptions. We stress that the themes identified were specific to our question, and that the findings do not preclude or exclude additional thematic synthesis.

Despite efforts to identify all studies related to teachers' perceptions of their anti-bullying training by broadening the fields by searching for Spanish and English language studies, it is unclear whether searching for literature in additional languages would have yielded other results [28].

We remind readers to “temper...inferences with regard to the extrapolation of this information” as search constraints, including time span, terminology and “simple human error” may have impacted results [29]. The dissertations, completed between 2015 and 2017, represented a gap of eight years within our search boundaries. Thus, our findings present a narrow to a narrower range, than initially sought [28]. As this study draws on data from three dissertations focused on general education suburban and urban teachers working in public and religious schools in the United States, the thematic synthesis is limited to one global region and excludes the perspectives of special education and bilingual teachers. Also, it is difficult to determine the effect of the integration of Christian values on teachers' perceptions of their training. Descriptive data within the dissertations also limits our knowledge regarding participants' gender and ethnic diversity. Data collection did not include questions on training specific to violence related to ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ identification, or bystanders, and at times, the authors presented data as indicative of all teachers, but only referenced two or three participants, and one study quoted at least four teachers without the author identifying the speaker. The thematic synthesis is limited to the authors' epistemological and ontological assumptions, which impacted their worldviews during data collection and synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to identify both effective and ineffective anti-bullying training from the available research on the perceptions of middle school teachers. Findings suggest that teachers engaged in formal and informal training that was not comprehensive and resulted in a limited understanding of bullying; which, in turn, affected teachers' responsiveness. In some instances, teachers gained a distorted understanding of the scientific literature on bullying.

Firstly, bullying as defined by teachers often implied that it was an individual problem, a problem with the bully. From what was gathered by teachers' in the three studies a bully is someone who: has a mental health disorder, was likely neglected or abused in childhood, and is someone who lacks social or problem-solving skills. By focusing on the individual, teachers remained unclear about the role of socio-ecosystems on violence. Although research linking depression and anxiety, among other mental health problems such as conduct disorder and substance abuse, and bullying is prevalent [30], few studies have focused on systemic approaches to bullying or the socio-cultural dimensions of bullying. For example, defining the problem in terms of constructs such as school climate and school violence, which are interpersonal and action-focused views, can help elucidate correlations, such as the link between positive school climate constructions and the reduction of school violence [31]. School violence is a construct that encompasses systemic dimensions such as “the role of teachers, bureaucracies, colonial structural bequests, physical ecologies, and intractable inequities” [32]. It is important to understand the impact of these systemic dimensions on students' behaviors if we are to address school violence. In addition, there is a lack of research into the relationship between bullying and schools as authoritarian institutions, whose purpose

is control and compliance: where teachers' and students' empowerment are suppressed ^[32]. Little is known about how authoritarian power relationships are replicated in student to student power dynamics.

Secondly, if bullying interventions and anti-bullying training are to include intersectional frameworks, where culture, school context, gender, and other identities are acknowledged, then the training should explore the implications of ideologies, discourses, as well as social actions on school violence. Interventions focused on the school climate as well as societal norms can have a greater reach in reducing school violence, and such an effort should include culture as part of the main discussion. Culture is oftentimes perceived as a distant agent in understanding child and adolescent development; nevertheless, such a premise is worth revisiting. Accordingly ^[33], culture not only is proximal to development, it also plays a vital role in organizing and reorganizing the microsystems surrounding the child: systems that include and define the daily practices of social communities (e.g., families, schools, neighborhoods, and healthcare). The integration of culture can shed light on the role of teachers, bystanders, and families alike in bullying prevention.

Lastly, there is a disconnect between teachers' knowledge and practices, bullying policies, and the role of school administrators. The teachers in this systematic review demonstrated knowledge about bullying from different sources, but few from formal training or school administration sources. Teachers saw school administrators as ultimately responsible for addressing bullying, selecting training programs, as well as setting and enforcing bullying policies (even though, some teachers resolved bullying problems inside the classroom). We argue that the disconnect between teachers, bullying policies and school administrators may close the door to effective bullying prevention, including the use of systemic approaches, and lead to inconsistencies in the ways bullying is addressed. Not involving all stakeholders often implies that regulatory responses to bullying rely on punitive approaches, such as suspension and expulsion ^[34]: limiting teachers' role to reporting incidents and referring students to administrators. Although data sharing should be part of bullying interventions, our findings indicated that this approach limits the integration of student-centered and community approaches that have been proven more efficient, not only in remedying but in preventing bullying ^[35].

CONCLUSION

Ongoing efforts in reducing bullying and improving school climate are needed. Since early 2000, policymakers have instituted many measures, including zero-tolerance policies; yet, these policies have failed to provide significant results in increasing safety or create responsive school cultures. Policies often lack the conceptual framework or are not clearly defined, not enough to be operationalized. A clear stand on bullying might help along with the proper early delivery and linkages of services as well as resources for the student population. Also, a lack of attention to training staff, addressing misleading practices, persists. Training serves a pivotal role in prevention and fostering a positive school climate and to be effective training needs to be consistent and ongoing. Teachers need time during the school year to implement and revisit anti-bullying lessons. The allocation of time to implement an anti-bullying curriculum without fear of retribution (for taking time away from preparing students for high-stakes testing) can help teachers address bullying issues throughout the year. There is also a need to foster partnerships with community agencies and work with policymakers to secure funding for training that will result in the dismantling of bullying and eliminate the culture of violence prevalent in and outside schools. A sustainable and positive climate within schools is the result of collaboration among teachers, administrators, families, communities, as well as public and private

institutions alike. More research is needed to understand the ways teachers' anti-bullying training will support these efforts.

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