

Introduction

In varying degrees, all schools experience some bullying behaviour among members of their community. Bullying causes a great deal of distress to a minority of individuals and contributes to a social environment in which many feel unsafe. In order to tackle this problem effectively, schools need well-developed survey instruments that can provide them with the basic facts about what is happening between members of the school community. The Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaires-Revised (PRAQ-R) have been designed to serve this purpose.

All schools are now expected to have well-considered anti-bullying policies and procedures for preventing bullying and for dealing with any cases that arise. This requires schools to be aware of what is actually going on between students. A true picture of the situation is never easy to obtain. Episodes of bullying and harassment often do not come to the attention of teachers. In fact, research has shown that most students who have been victimised by peers never inform the school authorities (Erceg & Cross, 2008; Rigby & Barnes, 2002). Unless students are given the opportunity to report what has happened to them anonymously, the school may remain ignorant of their situation. Teacher judgments of the nature and prevalence of school bullying vary widely, with some teachers believing that a great deal of bullying is going on and others little or none (Rigby, 2002b). Although parents can often provide useful information about what is happening to their children, some are unaware of the true situation in which their children find themselves.

The PRAQ-R is unique in providing a means by which perceptions and judgments can be pooled from three relevant sources: students, parents and teachers. Each sees things from a different angle. Teachers base their judgements largely on what they see happening in the classroom; parents on what they hear from their children; and students on what they have experienced through interactions with peers. Drawing on only one of these sources is usually inadequate. Schools can obtain a much better understanding of the world of peer relations when they can take into account information from all three sources.

Practical considerations have determined the content of the questionnaires. They needed to be short, yet capable of obtaining the most relevant information. Long questionnaires often deter potential respondents, whether they are teachers, parents or students. Being short, the PRAQ-R does not generate large masses of data that schools have difficulty handling, with subsequent delays in completing analyses and producing reports. In devising the questionnaires, care was taken to include questions that had clear and practical value in providing a basis for action.

The PRAQ-R also includes a questionnaire that can be used with relatively pre-literate children for whom wordy or involved questions are inappropriate. Experience has shown that with minimal assistance from teachers, primary school children can respond to illustrations rather than sentences. From their responses inferences can be made about their experiences of school

bullying. Given the importance of early intervention in addressing school bullying, such information is especially important.

A revision of the PRAQ

Just as the means by which bullying occurs change with advances in communication technology, so must questionnaires change to take into account new ways in which individuals engage in bullying behaviour. In this revision of the PRAQ, questions have been added to obtain information about bullying that occurs through the use of computers and mobile phones; this has become known as cyberbullying. It is thought that schools would find it useful to draw upon the knowledge and experience of students, parents and teachers, hence relevant questions have been inserted in the revised questionnaires. As with the previous edition, information of direct relevance to developing, updating and evaluating anti-bullying policy and programs can be obtained from each of the questionnaires.

All the questionnaires can be administered individually or to a group and each questionnaire takes 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

The student questionnaires

There are two questionnaires for use with students: The PRAQ-R for Junior Students and PRAQ-R for Senior Students.

In selecting the appropriate questionnaire, teachers are advised to consider carefully the literacy level of the students. Generally, the PRAQ-R for Junior Students would be used with students of 8 years of age or younger. The PRAQ-R for Senior Students should be used with secondary students and with students with adequate literacy in upper primary school. After students complete the questionnaire, teachers may like to discuss what has been discovered with the class, raise awareness of the issues and consider how the affected children can be helped.

PRAQ-R for Junior Students

This questionnaire is intended for lower primary school children and children with limited English language literacy. It provides information that can help teachers to assess:

- the general wellbeing and happiness of the children at school
- the quality of children's interpersonal relations with peers
- the nature and prevalence of bullying among young children
- the readiness of children to seek help from teachers and parents if they are being bullied.

Because this questionnaire is answered by a younger age group, less information can be provided by respondents. The PRAQ-R for Junior Students provides basic information about what is happening between young children.

PRAQ-R for Senior Students

The PRAQ-R for Senior Students is appropriate for students in upper primary and secondary levels. It provides useful information on the experiences and perceptions of students in relation to bullying at school. This includes:

- the nature and prevalence of bullying at the school
- where bullying takes place
- the consequences of bullying for student safety, attendance and general wellbeing
- whether students have informed others and with what outcomes
- student perceptions of their teachers' concern about school bullying
- whether students wish to engage in joint action with the staff to stop bullying.

PRAQ-R for Parents

This questionnaire is designed for use with parents whose child or children attend the school. Typically parents are prepared to answer and return the questionnaire. Their doing so is helpful not only in providing a valuable perspective on bullying at the school, but also in involving them in the process of dealing with the issue.

The focus is first on what parents can tell the school about the experiences of their children at school. Parents provide information that includes:

- how happy the child is at school
- how often, to the parent's knowledge, the child has been bullied or has bullied others at school
- how the child may have been affected by bullying, for example, by staying at home.

A second part enables parents to indicate how they think the school should address the problem of school bullying.

PRAQ-R for Teachers

This questionnaire is useful in providing information about the perceptions, views and suggestions of staff members at a school. Some of the questions enable the perceptions and judgments made by the staff of a school to be compared with those made by students. In addition, the PRAQ-R for Teachers provides an indication of the range of judgments and opinions held by the staff on bullying and the suggestions they have about ways of dealing with the problem. Information provided by this questionnaire includes:

- perceived prevalence of different forms of bullying at the school and where it occurs
- how safe staff believe the school to be for children
- the extent to which bullying occurs between students and staff
- perceived motivation of staff to address bullying
- views on specific steps that a school should take to address bullying.

When information has been obtained from the various groups and collated, these should be presented to the school staff so they have a comprehensive view of bullying in the school.

Next, steps can be planned and the data used to inform the shaping of school policies, the allocation of resources and how incidences are dealt with to minimise bullying in the future. Plans should also be made to disseminate information appropriately to parents and students.