The repercussions of reporting bullying: some experiences of students at an independent secondary school

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This article reports on the complex web experienced by young people when making decisions to report bullying in school. The study was conducted in the secondary school of an independent day and boarding school in the East of England. A Participatory Action Research approach was used with student voice and perspective at its core. This study involved five students as co-researchers with the first author to explore the concept of 'snitching' about bullying. Data were collected from the wider student group through a variety of methods including questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. The findings suggest that the process of reporting bullying is more complex than adults once thought. Students have to negotiate a complex web in firstly deciding if the bullying is serious enough to report. The concept of 'serious' bullying is contentious, particularly between boarders and day students, but physical abuse and/or repetition tended to be characteristic of 'serious' bullying. Once considered 'serious' enough, students have to weigh up the potential repercussions from the bully or the wider friendship group if they 'snitch'. Students were therefore in conflict between loyalty to the bully and wider friendship group in deciding if unfairness had taken place and should be reported. Finally students needed to decide who they trusted to report the bullying to. The students in this study often reported to teachers who they perceived as supportive and authoritative.

Keywords: bullying, snitching, independent school, participatory action research.

Introduction

Young people face difficulties when reporting bullying in school and fear being labelled:

'…a 'grass' or a 'mummy's boy' should they decide to report experiences of bullying.'
(Oliver & Candappa, 2007, p. 82)

Given that the advice to pupils is to report bullying to their teachers, Moore and Maclean (2012) suggest surprise at the reluctance pupils have about disclosing bullying to them. However, before reporting bullying, victims and witnesses consider the risks and consequences associated with telling anybody and are concerned about whether they will be believed and what the

potential negative repercussions of telling somebody else might be (Black, Weinles & Washington, 2010; deLara, 2012). In 2016, the UK anti-bullying charity *Ditch the Label* estimated that 1.5 million young people had experienced bullying in the past year, and that half never told anybody. In 2015/16 Childline delivered counselling about bullying to over 25,700 children and young people and found that 12% had not told anybody about it (Childline, 2016). Young people who do report bullying tend to confide in adults, either teachers or parents (Childline, 2016; Ditch the Label, 2016). However despite young people confiding in adults, dissatisfaction has been reported with how bullying complaints are handled.

This paper reports on a study that investigated reasons why young people, in an independent day and boarding school, might be reluctant to report bullying and explored the potential barriers faced when they tried to seek support.

Theoretical position

Recently there has been a shift from understanding bullying in terms of the personality traits of the bully and victim to understanding more about the social construction of bullying and it's manifestation in groups (Horton, 2011; Schott & Sondergaard, 2014). Accordingly, Horton (2011) suggests that if bullying is a widespread problem involving large numbers of students, then it does not seem plausible that it derives entirely from individual personality traits. Supporting this position, Schott (2014) acknowledges that moving the focus of bullying to further understanding group dynamics and processes does not diminish the bullying experience for individuals, rather the focus shifts to the process of being accepted, or not, by the group. Subsequently bullying might be more usefully understood as:

> …a social phenomenon involving ordinary children in particular situations. (Horton, 2011,
>
> p. 269)"

This stance focusses on the changing positions within a bullying encounter, and argues that individuals can sometimes be the bully, sometimes be the victim and sometimes the

bystander/witness, so relations within groups and the dynamics of the group become the focus (Schott & Sondergaard, 2014). In order to understand more about bullying as a social construct, there is a need to listen to young people and consider the context in which the bullying has occurred. In a boarding school, students spend the majority of their time interacting together so context could be crucial in our understanding. This study therefore was underscored by social constructionism and fully involved and engaged students at an independent day and boarding school in the research process.

Context

Ditch the Label (2016) found three main reasons why bullying is not reported: young people are fearful of being labelled as a 'snitch' (36%), they can deal with it themselves (36%) and they are afraid that reporting it will make the bullying worse (34%). Childline (2016) supports these findings but also suggests that young people are not always aware that they are being bullied or do not think that the bullying they are experiencing is serious enough to warrant it being reported.

Serious bullying is usually associated with direct behaviours: face-to-face actions including hitting, threatening and calling names (Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010;). By contrast, indirect bullying is recognised as rumour spreading, social exclusion, forcing others to do something they do not want to do and has been perceived as less serious by adults and young people alike (Maunder et al., 2010). Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, and Hanson (2010) found that direct bullying behaviours were more likely than indirect bullying behaviours, to be reported which could suggest the latter are not associated with seriousness. These perceptions may lead to normalising the behaviour resulting in a lack of urgency to report it (Maunder et al., 2010; deLara, 2012). Young people experience a sense of helplessness when describing bullying behaviours they believe are not serious enough to report or, on the other hand, are extremely serious but there is nothing that anybody can do about it (deLara, 2012). Indeed

bullying at independent day and boarding schools has been described as something that 'just happens' due in part to an institution's past legacy and the potential normalisation of verbal and physical assaults (Poynting and Donaldson, 2005). This perception could distinguish bullying in these institutions from bullying in maintained schools.

The reluctance to report bullying is also related to perceived roles within friendship groups and in wider peer groups. Salmivalli (2010) and Schott and Sondergaard (2014) consider how young people perceive their role within their social groups and their belonging to these groups. In the context of a school class for example, students are expected to mix together (Horton, 2011). However, during these interactions questions about belonging to the group can emerge and some fear rejection by their peers and ultimate marginalisation from them (Sondergaard, 2014). There is a possibility that this sense of fitting in within predetermined groups is exacerbated in boarding schools as students live there and do not have the opportunity to leave the groups in the way day students do. This could be a reason why Pfeiffer and Pinquart (2014) found lower levels of life-satisfaction among bullied boarding students than bullied day students.

Seeking support

Childline (2016) acknowledge the feelings of isolation and upset young people experience as a result of bullying. They also recognise that if young people report bullying to adults they need to be confident that they will be supported and that steps will be taken to end it. However, young people are often reluctant to report bullying to adults because they are not confident about the reaction from them. Adults do not do enough to help, or they can do too much and make the situation worse or young people are fearful of being reprimanded for reporting bullying (deLara, 2012;). Oliver and Candappa (2007) assert that pupils are:

'…engaged in a complex process of risk assessment, based on the anticipated responses of their peers and of adults in their immediate social environment of the school, and at home.' (p.76)

Teacher support to bullied students has not been consistent. Black et al. (2010) and Petrosino et al., (2010) in their American research suggest that large numbers of students chose to either not report bullying to teachers (64%) (Petrosino et al., 2010), or found that reporting the bullying did not work (45%) (Black et al., 2010). Ditch the Label (2016) found that of those who were bullied, 60% reported the bullying with 87% telling a teacher and 42% of them reported dissatisfaction. La Fontaine, (1991) found fewer boarders received positive adult intervention with four times as many reporting a negative result when they reported bullying. On the contrary, Novick and Isaacs (2010) found that teachers were more likely to handle an incident of bullying when they felt prepared to do so, highlighting issues around teacher training. Theses authors suggest the characteristics of particular teachers might be important in determining how bullying is addressed and describe them as likely to be 'most active, engaged and responsive.' (p.291).

Akin to telling teachers, some research suggests that young people are apprehensive about telling family members about bullying Moore & Maclean, 2012). Childline (2016) describe how some young people perceive their parents as not understanding the impact that bullying is having on them; some parents told their child to ignore the bullies or assumed their child was over-reacting. Indeed Sawyer et al. (2011) report the reaction that parents had to learning that their child had self-reported as being bullied. While many were surprised, some simply thought bullying was part of childhood, others believed their child had experienced bullying because they had encouraged it. Other research however shows that many young people chose to confide in family members ranging from 78% (O'Brien & Moules, 2013) to 86% (Ditch the Label, 2016). The latter found 88% were satisfied with the support they received.

The context of where and how bullying takes place may be important for how it is reported, there is a possibility that there is an immediate reaction from young people as to the type of support they seek. This support could be context specific. For example, if a young person is the victim of cyber-bullying within the family home they might be more likely to turn to their parents, for support. Conversely if they experience bullying at school they might be more likely to seek support from friends or a teacher. How their complaint is received will have an impact on how likely they are to seek support from adults in the future. Missing from the literature is an understanding of young people's own perspective on bullying issues.

The study

This study explored bullying in a single independent school in the East of England with boarding and day provision. Two cycles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) were conducted through planning, acting, observing, reflecting (Lewin, 1946). In recognising the social construction of bullying and that meanings are varied and multiple, this study focuses on the co-construction of knowledge through human relationships and collaboration. Consequently the research was conducted alongside the students of the school rather than on them.

Five self-selecting students, who called themselves R4U, (Research for you) worked with the first author to form the research team. R4U were directly involved in the research process through data collection, analysis and dissemination (O'Brien, 2014). Participating students were self-selecting across years 7 to 13 (85 girls, 70 boys). Figures one and two below show how these students participated:
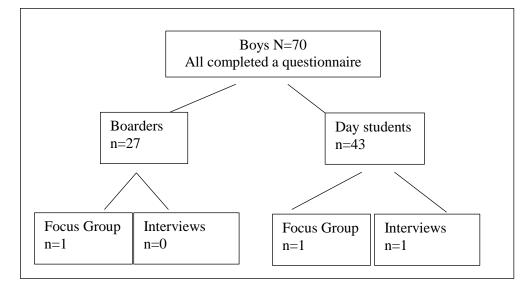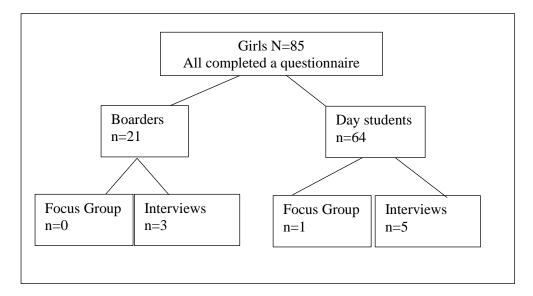
Figure 1: Number of boys participating in the study across two PAR cycles

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │        Boys N=70            │
                    │  All completed a questionnaire │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                       /                         \
          ┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
          │   Boarders       │          │   Day students   │
          │   n=27           │          │   n=43           │
          └──────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
             /        \                    /            \
   ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐  ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐
   │ Focus Group│ │ Interviews │  │ Focus Group│ │ Interviews │
   │ n=1        │ │ n=0        │  │ n=1        │ │ n=1        │
   └────────────┘ └────────────┘  └────────────┘ └────────────┘
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Figure 2: Number of girls participating in the study across two PAR cycles

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │        Girls N=85           │
                    │  All completed a questionnaire │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                       /                         \
          ┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
          │   Boarders       │          │   Day students   │
          │   n=21           │          │   n=64           │
          └──────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
             /        \                    /            \
   ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐  ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐
   │ Focus Group│ │ Interviews │  │ Focus Group│ │ Interviews │
   │ n=0        │ │ n=3        │  │ n=1        │ │ n=5        │
   └────────────┘ └────────────┘  └────────────┘ └────────────┘
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The focus group lasted for one hour and interviews were between twenty and ninety minutes long. They took place at the school at lunchtime and immediately after school and participants could chose to be interviewed by a member of R4U or the adult researcher. Five students chose R4U interviews while four chose to be interviewed by the adult. Parental and teacher views were gathered but this paper focuses specifically on the views of the students. Ethical approval was granted from Anglia Ruskin University.

Two PAR cycles were followed. In cycle one, R4U were recruited and trained and we explored the school's bullying definition as well as satisfaction with how bullying is addressed. A surveymonkey questionnaire and focus group were used to collate data (n=93). The purpose was to ascertain the bullying issue for the school as decided by the students themselves for exploration in cycle two.

Findings from cycle one show that less boarders (n=6, 4 boys and 2 girls) reported being victims of bullying than day students (n=21: 8 boys and 13 girls). Of the 57 students (34 boys: 12 boarders and 22 day students, 23 girls: 6 boarders and 17 day students) involved in a bullying incident (bullying others, being bullied and/or witnessing bullying), 24 reported it (9 boys: 3 boarders and 6 day students, 15 girls: 12 boarders and 3 day students) and 33 did not (25 boys: 9 boarders and 16 day students, 8 girls: 3 boarders and 5 day students). Reasons for non-reporting included two concepts:

1) The bullying not being 'serious' enough to report

2) Young people feared being labelled a 'snitch'.

These concepts became the core bullying issue for cycle two. We did not ask students in cycle two about their roles in a bullying incident but we further explored their understanding of what constitutes 'serious' bullying and whether being labelled as a 'snitch' would deter them from reporting bullying. Paper questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data (n=62).

Findings

Across the data, from both cycles, three key themes were evident:

- Satisfaction after reporting bullying

- The concept of serious bullying

- Fitting in with peers

Satisfaction after reporting bullying

In cycle one, 24 students reported bullying and 15 (7 boys: 3 boarders and 4 day students, 8 girls: 1 boarder and 7 day students) were satisfied with the outcome. Two reasons were cited. Firstly, the bullying was promptly dealt with:

Everything was sorted out. (Year 8, male, boarder)

It was sorted and I didn't have to worry about it again (Year 9, female, day student)

Secondly, students felt listened to and felt a sense of satisfaction that their complaint had been taken seriously and the situation was handled appropriately.

It was dealt with in the appropriate manner and when they continued to ignore the rules one was expelled (Year 10, male, day student).

I was happy that the student was not punished severely but they appreciated how I felt. (Year 9, female, day student)

Nine of the 24 reporting students were not happy with the outcome (2 boys: both day students, 7 girls: 2 boarders and 5 day students). Some told us how the bullying became worse after reporting it:

The girl that was doing the bullying did not get any punishments for the things that she had done. The teacher said to the girl that she must apologise, but to this day she never did say sorry. (Year 8, female, day student)

Bullies knew they had been reported. (Year 11, female, boarder).

Others felt their complaint was not taken seriously either by the perpetrator or the teacher who the incident had been reported to.

…..the bully didn't admit to the incident and only admitted it halfly. She didn't get any punishments, she didn't apologise and didn't think of understanding how I felt. (Year 8, female, day student)

They didn't see the punishment through to the end (Year 10, male, day student)

Reasons for non-reporting were explored further in the second PAR cycle and participants reported a mixed response to teacher support. The importance of forming a trusting relationship was expressed during the interviews:

I have a really good relationship with my tutor... (Rachel, day student)

Other participants did not share the same view. Alisha (day student) for example, said she would not report bullying to a teacher because she was fearful of the bully finding out:

….because they might tell off the bullies and then the bullies will like get back at you.

Support from teachers was not consistent. Some students suggested that teacher support was provided by individual teachers who took the time to listen to them when they were upset and reassure them that the issue would be resolved:

So I think the best teacher to talk to is [Mrs A] and even though people are scared of her I would recommend it, because she's a good listener and she can sense when you don't want to talk about something, whereas the other teachers force it out of you. (Isabella, boarder)

For others, this level of teacher support was not received:

I went to the teachers a couple of times but, no, I don't think they could do anything to stop it, because, you know, it was just remarks that they called me, you know, they called me names and stuff. I did sort of go three times and it still kept on going, so I just had to sort of deal with it….. (Rhys, day student)

The concept of serious bullying

Boarders and day students had different perceptions about the seriousness of bullying and the extent of the problem in the school. More boarders than day students for example, suggested that bullying was either a rarity or did not happen at all.

> I have been to 3 schools & visited 4 others, [*this school*] I believe has the best policy mainly involving students & I have seen the least amount of serious bullying here out of everywhere else I have seen." (Year 13, male, boarder)

> Well this is a bully free school but I do some minor bullying (teasing). (Year 7, female, boarder).

Overall, students did not consider a blanket approach to what constituted serious bullying but focussed on the multiple aspects they were familiar with. The main components of serious bullying were two-fold. Firstly, physical abuse was always acknowledged as serious bullying:

> …because physical, like it can be more hurtful, like it can actually have long term damage, but words, they're just words, they're just said a couple of times and then it goes away. (Rachel)

> I think like physical when someone like punches you, you don't take it as a joke, do you, you always think it's serious…so if someone's... like constantly coming up and like hitting you, I think that's the worst thing. (Claire)

Verbal bullying on the other hand was largely dependent on context and motivation, as well as the perception of the recipient.

> If they called you something really offensive then I think you should take it on that it's really serious because you could get really offended, like racism, if they call you one word…..like one racist word, that's still really offensive. (Phoebe, boarder)

Secondly, repetition was considered an important component of serious bullying:

…but it has to be constant it can't be a single time because that always happens. (Year 8, male, boarder)

When someone causes someone else distress and hurt long term or continuously. (Year 13, female, boarder)

Within the data a whole spectrum of views about bullying were evident as students were able to provide personal experiences of what they perceived serious bullying to be.

Fitting in with peers

A sense of loneliness and isolation experienced by bullied students was depicted in the data. Many did not want to feel further isolated by reporting it so instead chose to keep it to themselves. Isabella and Rhys both disclosed that they had either confided in a friend or a teacher about bullying but both felt it was more beneficial to keep the experience to themselves:

I don't tend to talk to anyone about it, I just keep it to myself and obviously that's the worst thing you should ever do, you should never keep it to yourself, because I regret keeping it to myself to be honest…. (Isabella)

…but I think I'd deal with it myself.....I think it's just over time I've just sort of hardened to it. (Rhys)

The data showed that students were often fearful to report bullying because of how it could impact on their social positioning in their friendship and wider groups. Reporting bullying was associated with negative connotations such as further repercussions from the bully:

I'm scared that if I tell then the bullying will still go on and they will do more. (Year 7, female, day student)

I think like the key thing when you tell someone about bullying you always think that you're going to be called a snitch and they're going to come back, unless they like get expelled or unless like they have to move school, you know that you're going to have to

see them and you're going to be like, oh my gosh, they know that I've told on them. (Claire)

Or being disowned or shunned by the group:

I think everyone would talk about me behind my back and say I was mean and everyone would hate me. (Year 7, female, day student)

No one wants to be the unpopular kid. Snitching results in your own bullying, people may turn on you. (Year 13, female, day student)

In the focus group in cycle one, participants, discussed reasons why a bullied student would not report the bullying. John (day student) reflected:

John: They might be terrified – so out of fear. The bully might see them reporting it and come after them and sort of he knows what's happened.

These findings suggest that some students, regardless of day student or boarder status, would rather remain silent about bullying than experience isolation from peers or suffer negative responses from bullies without school support.

Discussion

Differences were found in perceptions of bullying between boarders and day students and the extent of the problem at the school, and it is possible that some boarders regarded certain bullying behaviours as 'normal' or a usual feature of school life, as suggested elsewhere (Poynting and Donaldson, 2007). Although our sample was small, our findings suggest that day students were more likely to be victims of bullying than boarders, a finding that is contradicted in the literature. Pfeiffer and Pinquart, (2014) found that boarders were more likely to be perpetrators *and* [emphasis added] victims of bullying than day students. These authors suggest that spending extra time with peers provides more opportunities for bullying in boarding schools when compared to day schools. However our study suggests the possibility that
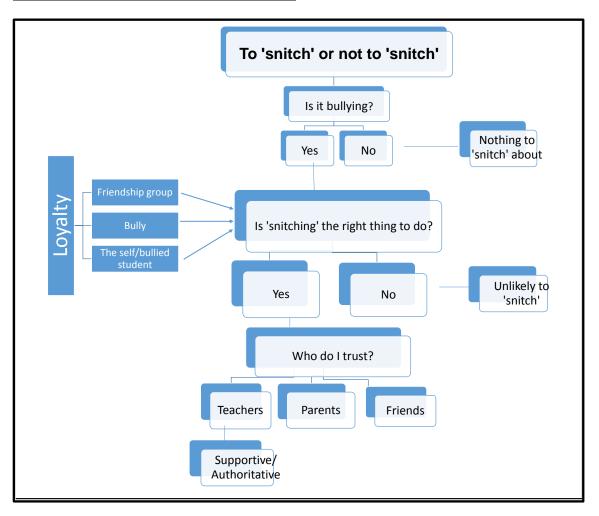
constructions and understanding of bullying is different for boarders and day students. As they spend more time together, it is possible that boarders resolve issues amongst themselves as they arise. Of course the findings could also imply that bullying was less of an issue for boarders, as found by Morgan (2004).

Even within the same context as this case study school, taking into account the different statuses as boarders or day students, constructions varied about how the students themselves understood bullying and its processes. Nevertheless the complexities of reporting bullying were the same for both groups of students.

The data shows that the decision by students to report bullying was not easily made due to fear of negative repercussions as noted in the literature ((Poynting and Donaldson, 2007; Childline, 2016). However, these findings add to the literature and highlight some key concepts considered by students in the decision to tell somebody about bullying. Firstly, students need to decide if the behaviour they are subjected to, or witness, constitutes serious bullying. Secondly, if it does, whether reporting the behaviour is the right thing to do. Finally students must decide who they can trust to report the bullying to. They must therefore navigate a complex web in deciding whether or not to tell anybody about bullying.

FIGURE THREE presents this complex web and is discussed below. Some participants in the study used the term 'snitch' to describe those who reported bullying so this term is used to describe the dilemma they experienced: 'The 'snitch' dilemma'.

FIGURE THREE: The 'Snitch' Dilemma

Is this bullying and is it 'serious enough' to report?

The first step in navigating this complex web is when a student needs to decide if bullying has occurred. Having decided it has, they need to determine if it is serious enough to report or 'snitch' about. Findings from this study suggest that a definition of serious bullying is contentious but physical abuse and/or repetition are likely to contribute to the bullying being serious. If the bullying is considered 'serious enough' then the student needs to decide: 'is telling about this bullying the right thing to do?' This decision is influenced by a student's loyalty to their friendship group, loyalty to the bully and loyalty to the bullied student or themselves. There is a possibility that this is more problematic in an independent day and

boarding school as students feel an allegiance to their school due to past legacies (Poynting and Donaldson, 2007).

Is telling the right thing to do?

Loyalty

Friendship group

Nuances in the data showed that students were concerned about potential retaliation from the bully or from their friendship groups if they decided to 'snitch'. Consequently they took the risk that they might subsequently be excluded from their friendship groups. This finding supports recent literature (Salmivalli, 2010; Schott & Sondergaard, 2014). 'Social exclusion anxiety', has been used to describe this concept and takes place in communities of belonging (Sondergaard, 2014, p.54). All members of a group want to belong to the group and social exclusion anxiety takes place when: '…a person's hope and longing to be part of a community is threatened' (Sondergaard, 2014, p.54). Social exclusion anxiety, postulates Sondergaard (2014), is different from 'social anxiety' which she states is about mortality and loneliness; social exclusion anxiety is about fearing social death rather than biological death. Reporting bullying could therefore be understood as a phenomenon that could change the dynamics within the group. Some students were more worried about the negative connotations linked with being a 'snitch', so in order not to tip the balance they refrained from reporting school bullying. This was certainly true of those students who were not concerned so much with the 'snitch' label but were concerned with the repercussions of 'snitching'.

The bully

The findings show that victims were often fearful of the bully finding out and the negative repercussions likely to follow, a finding supported in the literature (Salmivalli, 2010; Horton, 2011). Salmivalli (2010) considers the social standing within the group between the bully and the victim and recognises that if the victim has a lower social ranking within the wider group, other group members are less likely to empathise with them. Indeed studies on bullying at independent boarding schools suggest that issues around hierarchy are evident, with some studies suggesting that bullies are admired and tolerated while victims are recognised as 'weak' (Poynting and Donaldson, 2005).

If this concept of social ranking is reversed, other group members (bystanders) might be more likely to intervene as they consider 'fairness' in their decision to tell. Dungan, Waytz, and Young (2015), in their study on the psychology of whistleblowing, propose that whistleblowing can be seen as positive, or even heroic, or on the other hand, negative in terms of being a 'snitch', and there is often a trade-off made between loyalty and fairness in this decision. They propose that when fairness increases, whistleblowing increases and when loyalty increases whistleblowing decreases. Consequently, when applied to bullying, the perception of what is considered 'fair' could have an impact on a student's decision to tell.

The self/bullied student

Students need to consider if telling is the right thing to do either for themselves as the bullied student or on behalf of another bullied student. Although the guidance in schools is for students to report bullying, it is also important to recognise when students feel it is right 'to tell'. From a young age, children are encouraged not to 'tell tales' when they approach adults with day to day issues. Adults tell them to try to resolve issues amongst themselves to enable them to resolve conflict. However, by instilling these notions there is a possibility that we are confusing

children about when is the right time to report anything and how adults will react to what children say. Consequently, children are faced with a dilemma about whether or not they should tell anybody at all. In deciding to report bullying, students in this study had to determine if telling somebody would improve the situation for themselves or for other bullied students. The data shows that for some students, the situation got worse once the bullying had been reported.

Once resolved that telling is the right thing to do, students in the study, had to decide who they would tell, and this decision was heavily influenced by who they trusted.

Who do I trust?

Trust was an important construct in a student's willingness to report bullying. Novick and Isaacs (2010) note that teachers attitudes towards bullying and how they respond, as well as the general ethos of the school towards bullying, will play an important role in how this problem is addressed at school level.

Although this study found that the majority of students did not report bullying at all, for those who did, most confided in particular teachers they identified as trustworthy, a finding supported by Novick and Isaacs (2010). Caution needs to be exercised with these findings because many students seeking support from a teacher also sought support elsewhere, as identified by Moore and Maclean (2012). However, these findings suggest that the support and social systems of a school can either enable or disable bullying behaviours. As schools are in the forefront for promoting emotional well-being in students, having supportive staff members who are aware of the nuances associated with bullying, as identified in this study, and who value and listen to students could open up further possibilities of students turning to teachers for support.

Study Limitations

Undeniably a limitation of this study was not being able to have in-depth conversations will all participants. This approach may have added another layer to understanding bullying at the school. However we also recognise that this was an unfunded study with time and financial constraints and using a questionnaire to gather baseline data enabled all members of the school community to participate. In addition, this data allowed us to generate questions for the qualitative aspects of the study.

   This study sought views from 155 students (70 boys: 27 boarders and 43 day students; 85 girls: 21 boarders and 64 day students) and as more girls participated in the qualitative aspects of the study, they were subsequently over-represented in these findings. Conversely, the data were analysed by the research team and three members were boys; therefore the voice of boys was embedded in data analysis.

Conclusion

This co-produced study contributes to our understanding of bullying in two ways. Firstly, it adds to the limited academic debate regarding bullying in independent day and boarding schools. Through this authentic in-depth process with R4U, we were able to hear directly from students themselves about what the bullying issues were but there is a need to hear further from students in understanding more about the social construction of bullying and the changing roles students occupy.

   Secondly, the complexities of the decision-making process that students need to negotiate in their decision to report or 'snitch' about bullying have been synthesised and discussed. Students' decisions to seek support about bullying were largely determined by how they conceptualised the 'snitch'. The complex web presented in this paper, makes the issue of students dealing with bullying more problematic than perhaps adults once thought. Adults and

students need to work together to unravel this web and conceptualise reporting bullying in a different way rather than it being associated with negative implications. Constructing meanings together around 'snitching' and 'telling' could enable adults to understand how students conceptualise these terms. Promoting an ethos that encourages fairness and intervention when a situation is perceived as unjust or unfair along with a supportive culture could encourage students to seek support.

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