

Development, Feasibility, and Post-Training Outcomes of the STAC Teacher Training: A Companion Program for a Brief, Bystander Bullying Intervention

Aida Midgett^{1*} and Diana M Doumas²

¹ Institute for the Study of Behavioral Health and Addiction, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725, USA.

² Department of Counselor Education, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725, USA.

*Corresponding author:

Aida Midgett, Institute for the Study of Behavioral Health and Addiction, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725, USA

Submitted: 09 Oct 2020; Accepted: 17 Oct 2020; Published: 23 Oct 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a companion Teacher Training for a brief, bystander bullying intervention (STAC) and to assess feasibility and post-training outcomes. Although research supports the efficacy of the STAC intervention, training teachers to support student “defenders” may enhance the program’s impact. A mixed-methods design with sequential sampling was used with qualitative focus group data and quantitative survey data. The researchers used Consensual Qualitative Research to analyze qualitative data and independent sample t-tests to analyze quantitative data. Teachers (N = 18) from one high school in an urban community were recruited for the study. We used a phased research approach to meet the study aims. In Phase 1, teachers participated in focus groups to develop content for the training. Qualitative themes that emerged included identification of barriers to intervening in bullying, gaps in teacher knowledge, suggestions for supporting students to report bullying to teachers, the need for a supportive school culture, and attitudes toward students who bully. In Phase 2, we created the STAC Teacher Training based on the literature and feedback from participants in Phase 1. The 50-minute training includes 1) normative feedback regarding beliefs about bullying, 2) a didactic component that includes information about bullying, a description of the student STAC strategies, and corresponding teacher strategies used to support student “defenders” and 3) an experiential component for strategy practice. In Phase 3, we trained a sub-set of teachers (N = 8) in the STAC Teacher Training to evaluate feasibility and post-training outcomes. Results supported training feasibility and teachers reported an increase in knowledge, confidence to support students to act as “defenders”, as well as confidence, comfort, and self-efficacy in intervening in bullying situations. This study serves as a first step in developing a companion Teacher Training for the STAC intervention.

Keywords: teacher training, bullying, bystander, STAC

Introduction

Bullying is a significant problem for youth in the United States with 20.2% of students age 12-18 reporting being bullied at school and 15.3% reporting being cyberbullied [1]. Bullying is defined as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners, that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance, and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] [2]. Bullying may include verbal, physical, or relational/social aggression, damage to property, and cyberbullying (CDC, 2020) [2]. Because rates of bullying peak in middle school (26.4%), school-based bullying interventions are generally designed for this age group (Denny et al., 2015) [1,3]. Bullying, however, continues through high school, with 19.5% of high school students reporting being bullied at school (CDC,

2019) [4]. Additionally, high school seniors report the highest rates of cyberbullying (18.8%) among youth age 12-18 [1].

Bullying is also associated with a wide range of negative consequences for targets of bullying as well as students who witness bullying as bystanders. Research indicates bullying victimization in high school is associated with academic problems, internalizing symptoms, depression, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, substance use, and risky sexual behavior [5-12]. Similarly, witnessing bullying as a bystander is associated with feelings of isolation and guilt, helplessness, suicidal ideation, and substance use [13-16]. Researchers have also demonstrated that among high school students, witnessing bullying is associated with a wide range of negative mental health outcomes even when accounting for the effects of being a target of bullying [16].

The STAC Bullying Bystander Intervention

Findings from a meta-analysis focusing on bullying intervention programs indicate training bystanders to intervene is an important component of school-based bullying programs [17]. Although up to 80% of students report witnessing bullying, only 20-30% of bystanders intervene on behalf of targets [18,19]. Research indicates when bystanders do intervene by telling the bully to stop and telling an adult, bullying decreases and bystanders experience reductions in internalizing symptoms [20,21]. Thus, supporting bystanders to intervene when they witness bullying is an important intervention strategy not only to reduce bullying, but to reduce the negative consequences associated with being a bystander.

The STAC intervention is a brief, bullying bystander intervention that was developed to train middle school students how to “defend” students who are targets of bullying [22]. The STAC intervention includes a 90-minute in-person didactic and experiential training followed by two bi-monthly 15-minute booster sessions provided to reinforce skill acquisition. The didactic module includes education about bullying, including definitions of verbal, physical, relational, and cyberbullying, consequences of bullying, bystander roles, and a description of the four STAC strategies: (1) “Stealing the Show” – using humor or distraction to interrupt the bullying situation removing the attention away from the target, (2) “Turning it Over” – informing an adult about the bullying and asking for help, (3) “Accompanying Others” – befriending or providing supporting the targeted student, and (4) “Coaching Compassion” – gently confronting the perpetrator by increasing empathy for target. The experiential module includes role-plays in which students practice using the STAC strategies in hypothetical bullying situations. Students participate in two 15-minute booster sessions at 2 weeks and 4 weeks post-training for check-in, support, and brainstorming ways to effectively use the STAC strategies. The boosters are intended to reinforce skill acquisition.

Researchers recently adapted the STAC intervention for the high school level [23,24]. Findings from preliminary studies indicate that the STAC for High School program is effective in increasing student knowledge of types of bullying, knowledge of the STAC strategies, and confidence to intervene in bullying situations [23,25]. Additionally, results from a series of randomized controlled trials indicate training high school students to intervene as “defenders” is associated with decreases in internalizing symptoms, depression, and substance use [26-28].

Research, however, indicates that when examining the use of specific intervention strategies used by students trained in the STAC program, the use of the strategy “Turning it Over” is used the least frequently of all the STAC strategies among high school students who witness bullying [23,25]. Additionally, when comparing the use of “Turning it Over” across time, research shows a decline from use among elementary school (78%) compared to high school students (42.9%) [25,29]. Findings from qualitative research suggests that high school students are hesitant to report bullying to teachers because they believe teachers normalize and/or dismiss bullying behavior, do not care about bullying, and are not available or willing to help [24]. This is consistent with research suggesting that students’ beliefs that teachers will actively intervene in bullying are related to a greater willingness to report bullying [30]. Thus, training teachers to be aware of the negative impact associated with bullying and ways to respond to bullying and reports of

bullying may be an important addition to the STAC program.

The Need for Teacher Training to Support Bystanders

The majority of bullying occurs on school grounds, with the highest rate of bullying among high school students occurring in the classroom (42.3%) [1]. National data indicate that among students who are targets of bullying at school, only 46.3% of student’s report bullying, with students reporting to teachers more frequently than to educational support personnel [1,31]. Rates of reporting bullying to an adult decrease from middle school to high school, with the highest rates of reporting occurring during the 6th grade (57.2%) and the lowest rates of reporting occurring during the senior year (32.9%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Thus, anti-bullying interventions designed for high schools need to include training on how school personnel should respond to reports of bullying. Given that students report bullying more frequently to teachers than other adults at school, it may be particularly important to train teachers to respond to reports of bullying in a way that encourages students to reach out to them for support [31].

Teachers play a vital role in impacting bullying by clearly expressing disapproval of bullying, consistently intervening in bullying situations, and rewarding students’ efforts to counteract bullying [32]. In addition to responding effectively to student reports of bullying, how teachers manage bullying is also important. Teachers’ responses to a bullying incident impact the likelihood of future bullying [33]. Similarly, students’ perceptions of teachers’ anti-bullying behavior is positively related to sense of school belonging, which in turn is related to lower levels of bullying victimization [34]. Additionally, low levels of teacher self-efficacy for handling bullying are related to lower levels of intervening and associated with higher levels of victimization in the classroom [35,36].

Research also indicates students’ negative perceptions of their teachers’ efficacy in decreasing bullying is related to fewer reports of bullying to teachers by students who witness bullying as bystanders [37]. Student-teacher relationship quality is also positively related to students intervening in bullying situations [38]. Taken together, these studies indicate it is important for teachers to know how to respond to bullying and demonstrate that they are confident and comfortable managing bullying behavior. Further, the student-teacher relationship and student’s perceptions of teachers’ ability to manage bullying are related to student rates of intervening in bullying. Thus, anti-bullying interventions need to include training for teachers on how to respond to bullying, as well as how to support student bystanders to intervene in bullying situations.

The Current Study

Although research indicates the STAC for High School program is effective in teaching students how to act as “defenders,” findings suggest that high school students are reluctant to use “Turning it Over.” Further, the literature suggests that teachers play an important role in shaping the school climate regarding bullying and that their attitudes and behaviors are related to both bullying and the likelihood of students reporting when they witness bullying. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to develop a STAC Teacher Training that could be implemented with the STAC intervention with the specific goal of training teachers to provide support for students trained to act as “defenders.”

The two research questions were: a) What needs to be incorpo-

rated into a STAC Teacher Training to help teachers support students trained as “defenders” in the STAC intervention? and (b) Do teachers learn the material presented in the STAC Teacher Training and feel more confident to support “defenders” and manage bullying after participating in the training? We used a partially mixed, sequential mixed-methods design to develop the STAC Teacher Training and to conduct a preliminary study to assess the immediate impact of the STAC Teacher Training on teachers’ knowledge and confidence [39,40].

Objectives

An overview of the methodology is presented in Figure 1. In Phase 1, we used qualitative focus groups to obtain feedback from high school teachers to inform the development of a STAC Teacher Training. In Phase 2, we incorporated information from a review of the relevant literature and from Phase 1 focus groups to develop the STAC Teacher Training. In Phase 3, we used a single-group design to collect preliminary outcome data on teacher response to the STAC Teacher Training (e.g., does knowledge increase? do teachers understand the strategies? does confidence to support “defenders” increase? does comfort with and confidence intervening in bullying increase?) to provide data to further refine the STAC Teacher Training.

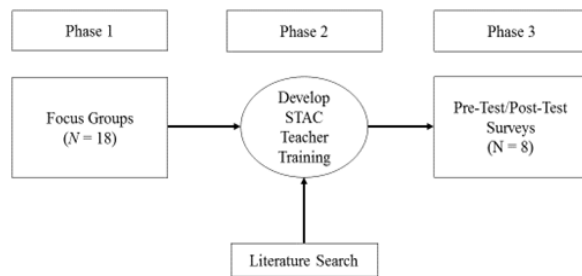


Figure 1: Overview of Study Methodology

Phase 1 Method and Materials Participants

Teachers were recruited from a Northwest public high school located in an urban city in the Northwest region of the United States. The sample consisted of 18 teachers ($n = 10$ females [55.6%]; $n = 8$ males [44.4%]). Participants ranged in age from 27-59 years old ($M = 41.83$ and $SD = 10.56$), with 94.4% identifying as White and 5.6% not reporting racial or ethnic origin. Participants reported having between 3 and 36 years of teaching experience ($M = 15.89$ and $SD = 10.38$) and between 3 and 36 years of experience specifically as high school teachers ($M = 12.50$ and $SD = 10.10$).

Procedures

The school counselor assisted the researchers in selecting a purposive sample of teachers. We used purposeful sampling to select teachers to participate in the study. First, we asked students to nominate teachers who they perceived as wanting to make a positive impact on reducing bullying at school. Next, school counselors and administrators scored each nominated teacher ($N = 36$) utilizing a rubric that including the following criteria for inclusion: caring for students beyond classroom setting, desire to be a positive influence on school climate, approachable to students,

receptive to students who report bullying to them, cares about addressing the problem of bullying, and leadership qualities. Based on their ratings, school counselors selected 20 teachers for participation in a focus group to provide feedback about developing the STAC Teacher Module.

The school counselor briefly discussed the study with each teacher. Of the 20 students selected, 18 were present for the focus groups. Immediately prior to conducting focus groups, a research team member collected informed consent. The researchers conducted two 45-minute focus groups with 8-10 participants each. A doctoral student facilitated the focus groups and a Masters student in Counseling was present to take notes. Participants were asked to describe their attitudes about bullying and experiences with bullying and provide feedback about what type of information should be included in the STAC Teacher Training to equip teachers with knowledge, skills, and confidence to support student who report bullying and intervene on behalf of targets. Researchers followed Hill et al.’s recommendation to develop a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix). Researchers recorded the groups for transcription purposes and provided teachers with a \$50 gift card to purchase classroom supplies to incentivize participation [41]. All study procedures were approved by the university review board and school district.

Data Analysis

Research team members employed Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) analyses to investigate teachers’ attitudes and experiences with bullying and elements they believed to be important in developing a teacher training to support students who report bullying and intervene as “defenders [41].” CQR incorporates phenomenological and grounded theory and is predominantly constructivist with postmodern influence [41]. Thus, it was a good fit for the project as we were interested in learning about what teachers felt they needed to know to be equipped to support students who witness bullying to act as “defenders.” the CQR semi-structured interview protocol structure was also well suited for the project, allowing the researchers to gain knowledge about specific areas of teachers’ perceptions and gaps in knowledge about bullying while allowing for spontaneous probes uncovering unexpected insights adding depth to findings. Additionally, CQR requires a team to reach consensus analyzing complex data which was consistent with the project.

Three team members (i.e., a faculty member, a Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral student, and a Counselor Education master’s student) analyzed the data. All three had different levels of experience conducting qualitative research, and the faculty member and doctoral student had worked together in this capacity several times in the past. Once the data were transcribed verbatim, each analyst individually identified initial domains. Next, the team met three times during the next month to achieve consensus on domains and core ideas. The team members utilized note cards to visually represent the data as recommended by Hill et al. [41]. Analysts relied on participant quotes to resolve disagreements, cross-analyze the data, and move into more abstract levels of analysis over time. An external auditor analyzed the data separately and provided the team with feedback throughout the analysis process. The external auditor’s feedback was consistent with the team’s analysis.

Results

Through CQR analysis, the team and external auditor agreed on five domains with supporting core ideas. Domain 1: Barriers (n = 14, 77%). Teachers identified barriers to effectively intervening in bullying including being uncertain about the definition of bullying, having a desire to remain neutral, and feeling like bullying behaviors are often hidden from adult view. For example, one teacher shared, “the definition of bullying makes it hard ... because we see physical and emotional things and that takes a long time to know if it's repeated... and what the intent is.” Another teacher talked about the challenge of remaining neutral when both students involved report bullying, “it's hard when you have both of the kids, you love both of the kids that are involved, and it's really hard... to have them complain and share their story and help them understand that you just have to, your neutral, you care about both of them.” Additionally, another teacher talked about bullying occurring outside adult view, “they're really good at hiding. They're really good at making sure that an adult doesn't see.”

Domain 2: Gaps in knowledge (n = 9, 50%). Teachers identified cyberbullying and relevant statistics about bullying as elements they thought would be helpful to include in a teacher training. For example, one teacher spoke about the need for further training in cyberbullying, “I don't know if there's a training about that, about how to handle that, how to see it, what to do, cuz that's all kind of new and becoming a really big issue.” Another teacher shared a similar sentiment, “...and it can be harder for Instagram, someone shows me something real quick and I'm like ok how do we deal with this...” Another teacher shared, “I would like to see some actual concrete numbers from [our high school] what are our students saying, what are their experiences. If it's too grand of a scale it seems not applicable to our circumstance.” Another teacher stated, “If the sources from the facts and stats are from the students themselves then it might open our eyes where the bullying is happening most often.”

Domain 3: Supporting “Turning it Over” (n = 11, 61%). Teachers offered suggestions about how to talk to students when they report bullying and the challenges associated with determining if further action is needed and reporting to administration when necessary. For example, a teacher stated, Trying to get them [students] to talk as much as possible and not jump to conclusions but try to figure out if it is really bullying or is there something going on that can be resolved between the two of them... a lot of times I get students who don't want to talk to a counselor. They don't want to talk to the VP. They just want to come in and talk to me to get some advice on what to do.... make sure to follow up with them, [say something like] ‘I want to talk to you about this again next week,’ ...And if they didn't talk to me in a week or so, I am going okay ‘so how did it go, what's going on...’ letting them know you're there for them and you'll help them.

Another teacher stated,

Once you see that it needs to go to another level...but they don't want me to report it, they don't want me to say anything, so that's

difficult because I know some bullying has crossed the line, and I tell them I have to report this at this point. But there are other times they're still trying to resolve this, they're just coming to me to get some advice. So, trying to figure out where is that line. When do I go down and talk to one of the VPs so they can take it to the SRO if need be, and they can determine what is going to be the best course of action.

Another teacher stated, “I haven't had too many instances but if they say I don't want you to do anything, I'm still probably going to do something.”

Domain 4: School culture (n = 13, 72%). Teachers spoke about fostering a supportive school culture by having a caring attitude toward students, setting classroom boundaries, and modeling respectful behavior. For example, one teacher spoke about conveying care to students, “I think it's the teachers who ask, ‘how's your day going; how are you doing; what's going on?’ You get a lot of conversations that way just by asking ‘how was your weekend.’” Another teacher talked about the importance of classroom management, “if any jokes even start, put a stop to it to establish those boundaries of what's acceptable in your classroom and what's not. It allows the kids to know, ‘ok this is a safe place. This is a place I want to be and I feel comfortable’.” Additionally, another participant indicated, “Teachers that don't ever belittle somebody for not knowing something, or they always re-teach without a blink, I think those things make an effect. They [students] make their decisions while they watch us.”

Domain 5: Students who bully (n = 12, 66%). Teachers spoke about having compassion toward students who bully, the desire to help all students involved, and the importance of helping perpetrators develop empathy for targets. For example, one teacher spoke, “they [students who bully] have an unmet need of some kind. And we love our kids.” Another teacher said “I really do believe somebody that's bullying, hurts...I think, immediately to both parties and I try to actively shift to what, how can we help the bully too. The bully is oftentimes a victim at some point.” Finally, a participant shared, If you can plainly point out to the individual that bullied exactly what they said and why it's hurtful and its effect on another person, most of the time I think they'll stop. I'll do that in my classroom if it's public especially. It's pointed out really clearly, that was unkind, this is why, this is how it made them feel. And that's bullying. I need you to stop. Most of the time that works but not always.

Phase 2

The researchers developed a 50-minute STAC Teacher Training based on (1) a review of the literature on teacher attitudes, knowledge, and behavior associated with effectively reducing bullying at the high school level and (2) feedback from teachers participating in the focus groups in Phase 1. Specific examples of how focus group data informed program development for each of the five Phase I domains are described in Table

Table 1: Focus Group Feedback Incorporated to the STAC Teacher Training

Domains	Core Ideas	Content Incorporated to the Training
Barriers	Teachers identified barriers to effectively intervening in bullying including being uncertain about the definition of bullying, having a desire to remain neutral, and feeling like bullying behaviors are often hidden from adult view.	<p>The definition of bullying, with examples of behaviors that are and are not considered bullying.</p> <p>Types of bullying (i.e., physical, verbal, socio-emotional, cyberbullying).</p> <p>Information from the literature encouraging teachers not to remain neutral and take action to stop bullying behaviors.</p> <p>Normative feedback activity where teachers rank order locations where bullying most often occurs with percentages (i.e., hallway or stairwell, classroom, cafeteria, outside on school grounds, bathroom or locker room).</p>
Gaps in Knowledge	Teachers identified cyberbullying and relevant statistics about bullying as elements they thought would be helpful to include in a teacher training.	Bullying and cyberbullying statistics were incorporated through normative feedback activities, and included both local and national high school prevalence data.
Supporting “Turing it Over”	Teachers offered suggestions about how to talk to students when they report bullying and the challenges associated with determining if further action is needed and reporting to administration when necessary.	Role-plays included information about how teachers should communicate with students who report bullying in a way that encourages and supports them to intervene. Through role-plays teachers practiced reporting behaviors that are considered bullying.
School Culture	Teachers spoke about fostering a supportive school culture by having a caring attitude toward students, setting classroom boundaries, and modeling respectful behavior.	Information about how teachers can change school climate and a role-play where teachers can practice what to do when they witness bullying in their classroom. Teachers are trained to interrupt bullying behavior, educate students about bullying being unacceptable, send a clear anti-bullying message to bully, and build relationship with the target.
Students who Bully	Teachers spoke about having compassion toward students who bully, the desire to help all students involved, and the importance of helping perpetrators develop empathy for targets.	<p>Information was included that although it is important to not view the bully as a “bad person,” teachers should always intervene in bullying and send a consistent message to students who bully that their behavior is unacceptable. Further, teachers were trained on the importance of students receiving a negative consequence when they engage in bullying behaviors. Information about how to support students who intervene and report bullying was included.</p> <p>Through role-plays, teachers practiced talking to students who bully about how their behavior impacts targets.</p>

The STAC Teacher Training is comprised of a three modules: (1) normative feedback regarding beliefs about bullying, (2) a didactic component that includes information about bullying, a description of the student STAC strategies, and corresponding teacher strategies used to support students acting as “defenders,” and (3) an experiential component during which teachers practice using the strategies.

Normative Feedback Module. The normative feedback module begins with teachers completing a brief 4-item survey asking them to estimate local and national prevalence rates related to bullying among high school students. Example questions include: (a) What percentage of high school students in the state report being bullied? (b) What percentage of high school students in the state report being cyberbullied? (c) Rank the order of the location in which you think high school students are most frequently bullied (hall/stairwell, classroom, cafeteria, outside on school grounds, and bathrooms/locker rooms), (d) Among high school students, what percentage of students do you think report bullying to an adult? After survey completion, the trainers provide teachers with actual prevalence data and facilitate a brief discussion regarding potential discrepancies between perceptions and the actual rates.

Didactic Module. The didactic module comprises information that parallels the information provided in the STAC training for students including the definition of bullying, types of bullying, negative consequences for targets and bystanders, and positive outcomes for students who are trained to intervene as “defenders”. Additionally, trainers also discuss “perceptions vs. facts” about bullying.

STAC Strategies Module. During the STAC strategies module, trainers present the four STAC strategies students learn to use to intervene as “defenders” and specific strategies teachers can utilize to support student “defenders.” The four STAC strategies with strategies are described below.

“Stealing the Show.” When students use “Stealing the Show” they use humor and/or distraction to interrupt a bullying situation, displacing the peer audience’s attention away from the target. Trainers encourage teachers to approach a situation where a student is using humor and/or distraction to interrupt bullying behavior and join in the conversation. Trainers also teach teachers to support the student who is attempting to break up the situation by encouraging the peer group to disperse and to separate the perpetrator(s) from the target in a subtle manner. Finally, trainers encourage teachers to reinforce the “defender” with positive feedback.

“Turning it Over.” When students use “Turning it Over” they inform an adult about the bullying situation and ask for help, particularly when the situation seems unsafe or students are not sure what to do. Trainers teach teachers to assure students they did the right thing by reporting bullying to them, particularly in cases of physical bullying and cyberbullying. Trainers also encourage teachers to reinforce that bullying is not okay and that it takes maturity and strength to ask for help when dealing with these types of situations. Trainers also teach teachers to share with “defenders” that contrary to common perception that students who report bullying are “snitches,” students are usually supportive of students who report bullying to teachers. Trainers also instruct teachers to report bullying to administration and to teach students about the importance of continued documentation so that adults at school can take action.

Trainers also encourage teachers to provide specific information about how to document cyberbullying through immediate screenshots and/or pictures.

“Accompanying Others.” When students use “Accompanying Others” they reach out to their peer who was targeted to communicate that what happened is not acceptable, that the target is not alone at school, and that they care about the students who was targeted. When teachers see or hear about “defenders” using this strategy, teachers are encouraged to let students know they are being a good friend to the target and that their actions can make a significant difference in their peer’s life. Further, trainers encourage teachers to reinforce to the “defenders” that communicating to targets that they are cared for and not alone at school can make a positive impact. Trainers also teach teachers to encourage “defenders” to check back in with their peer who was targeted and to remind them that students can demonstrate care either overtly (e.g., by asking if the target would like to talk about what happened) or covertly (e.g., by just spending time with the peer who was targeted) and that highest school students often do not want to talk about bullying directly.

“Coaching Compassion.” When students use “Coaching Compassion” they gently confront students who bully after a bullying incident to indicate this type of behavior is unacceptable to raise awareness and foster empathy toward the target. Trainers teach teachers to support “defenders” using this strategy by monitoring the situation carefully and stepping in if needed to ensure the “defender” is safe. Trainers encourage teachers to provide positive feedback to the “defender” and to reinforce that bullying of any kind is unacceptable. Also, trainers encourage teachers to share with the “defender” that for students who bully infrequently, increasing awareness and empathy may be helpful in resolving the problem.

Experiential Module. After trainers present each strategy, they conduct a demonstration during which they ask volunteers to engage in a role-play in which student(s) use a STAC strategy and a teacher supports the student acting as a “defender” utilizing the corresponding strategies for teachers. Next, trainers provide information regarding how teachers can change school climate followed by a demonstration of a teacher intervening in a bullying situation. The training concludes with a brief discussion of the demonstration where trainers reinforce strategies that research supports are effective.

Phase 3 Methods and Materials Participants

Teachers were recruited from the same high school as Phase I. Of the 18 teachers who participated in the focus groups, 44.4% (n = 8; 55.6% female, 44.4% male) participated in the STAC Teacher Training program and completed pre-test and the immediate post-test surveys. Participants’ ages ranged from 28-58 years old (M = 42.72 and SD = 9.80) and years of experience as a high school teacher ranged from 1-28 years (M = 11.47 and SD = 8.31). The majority of teachers in the sample identified as White (83.3%), with 5.6% identifying as Hispanic, and 11.1% other. A series of independent sample t-test and chi square analyses revealed no differences in demographic variables between teachers who did and did not complete the immediate follow-up survey.

Procedures

The school counselors assisted the team with recruitment by inviting teachers by email to complete the informed consent form and the baseline survey. After completing the baseline survey, teachers were trained in the 50-minute STAC Teacher Training and completed an immediate post-training survey. The team provided teachers with a \$50 gift card to purchase school supplies as an incentive for participation. The University's Institutional Review Board and School District Research Board approved all study procedures.

Measures

Demographic Survey. Teachers completed a brief demographic questionnaire that included questions about age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of experience teaching.

Knowledge and Confidence to Support "Defenders." The Teacher-Advocates Pre- and Post-Scale (TAPPS) was used to measure knowledge and confidence in supporting "defenders." The questionnaire was adapted from the Student-Advocates Pre- and Post-Scale which is comprised of 11 items that measure knowledge of bullying behaviors, knowledge of the STAC strategies, and confidence intervening in bullying situations [22]. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 4 (Totally Agree) and are summed to compute a total scale score. The TAPPS has established content validity and adequate internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .75 - .83 [22,25,42-44]. We modified the TAPPS items to reflect the goals of the STAC Teacher Training. Examples of items include: "I know what verbal bullying looks like," "I know how to support students who reach out to students who are targets of bullying," and "I feel confident in my ability to do something helpful to support students who report bullying to me." We summed items to create the Knowledge Subscale ($\alpha = .72$) and the Confidence Subscale ($\alpha = .95$).

Confidence Managing Bullying. The Teacher's Attitudes about Bullying Questionnaire is a 22-item questionnaire that contains five subscales. We used the 3-item Confidence in Managing Bullying Subscale which includes the items "I am confident that I will know what bullying is when I see it," "I am confident that I will know how to respond if one of my students is being victimized by a peer," and "I am confident that I will put my knowledge into practice and actively respond in bullying situations." Items were summed to create the scale [45]. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .77.

Table 2: Statistical Contrasts for Knowledge, Confidence to Support "Defenders" and Comfort and Confidence to Intervene in Bullying Situations

Item	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Cohen's d
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	t(7)	p	
Knowledge of Bullying and Teacher STAC Strategies	24.38 (2.77)	28.25 (3.37)	-2.95	.02*	1.26
Confidence Supporting "Defenders"	6.38 (2.50)	11.13 (1.81)	-5.39	.001***	2.18
Confidence Intervening in Bullying	8.13 (2.77)	10.00 (1.31)	-3.91	.006**	.86
Comfort Intervening in Bullying	14.50 (3.38)	16.88 (2.42)	-3.37	.01**	.81
Bullying Self-Efficacy	2.88 (0.35)	3.38 (0.52)	-2.65	.03*	1.13

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Comfort Managing Bullying. Teacher's comfort with managing bullying was measured using items from the National Education Association Bullying Survey [46]. Teachers were asked "How comfortable would you feel intervening when you see the following bullying behaviors?" followed by 5 types of bullying and their definitions (a) Physical (hitting, pushing, or kicking), (b) Verbal (general teasing or name calling), (c) Relational (rumor spreading or excluding someone from a group), (d) Cyberbullying (defined as "sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital devices, such as mobile phones"), and (e) Sexting (defined as "sending or forwarding sexually explicit photos, videos or messages from a mobile phone or other electronic device"). Items were summed to create the scale. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .89.

Bullying Self-Efficacy. Teachers' self-efficacy in handling bullying situations was measured by one item from the National Education Association Bullying Survey [46]. The item "I have effective strategies for handling bullying" was rated on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Data Analysis

We conducted all analyses using SPSS version 25.0. We computed descriptive statistics for all variables at pre-test and post-test. We conducted a series of paired-sample t-tests to evaluate changes from pre-test to post-test. We used an alpha level of $p < .05$ to determine statistical significance and Cohen's d to measure effect size with magnitude of effects interpreted as follows: small ($d = .20$), medium ($d = .50$), large ($d = .80$) [47]. We controlled for Type I error by using the Holm-Bonferroni procedure [48].

Results

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and statistical contrasts. As seen in Table 2, teachers reported an increase in knowledge ($p < .02$, Cohen's $d = 1.26$), confidence to support "defenders" ($p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.18$), confidence in intervening in bullying situations ($p < .01$, Cohen's $d = .86$), comfort intervening in bullying situations ($p < .01$, Cohen's $d = .81$), and bullying self-efficacy ($p < .03$, Cohen's $d = 1.13$). All effect sizes were large. Results support the effectiveness of the teacher training to increase knowledge and confidence in both working with student bystanders and intervening directly in bullying situations from pre-training to post-training.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop the STAC Teacher Training and to assess if teachers learned the training content and reported increased confidence in supporting student “defenders” and managing bullying from pre-training to post-training. Qualitative data from Phase 1 resulted in five domains that informed the content development of the Teacher Training: barriers, gaps in knowledge, supporting “Turning it Over,” school culture, and students who bully. Qualitative data from focus groups was used in combination with a literature review to develop the content for the STAC Teacher Training in Phase 2. Quantitative findings from Phase 3 indicated teachers reported increased knowledge and confidence to support students who intervene and to directly intervene in bullying situations from pre-training to post-training.

Qualitative data revealed teachers experience barriers which prevent them from intervening in bullying situations, gaps in knowledge of cyberbullying, and challenges associated with supporting students when they “Turn it Over.” These experiences reported by teachers can result in low teacher self-efficacy, which researchers have found is associated with teachers being less likely to intervene in bullying situations [35]. When teachers do not intervene, students could perceive them as not caring about bullying or knowing what to do [24]. This perception could be associated with students not report bullying to teachers [37]. Therefore, our findings are important because they identify specific areas in which teachers could benefit from additional training, potentially increasing their self-efficacy in supporting students who report bullying and intervening directly in bullying behaviors.

Our findings also demonstrated that teachers report beliefs about bullying that align with the literature and are likely to make a positive shift in school culture related to bullying. For example, teachers spoke about the importance of fostering a supportive school culture by having a caring attitude toward students, setting classroom boundaries, and modeling respectful behavior. These findings are consistent with studies that show students are more likely to intervene in bullying when they perceive they have a positive relationship with their teachers and that classroom structure is associated with less peer-to-peer aggression [38,47]. In contrast, teachers also talked about perceptions and beliefs that although intuitive to them, are contrary to what is reported in the bullying literature or considered effective in bullying prevention and intervention. For example, teachers indicated that bullying mostly occurs hidden from adult view; however, prevalence data shows that 42.3% of the time bullying takes place in the classroom [1]. Increasing teachers’ knowledge about how frequently bullying occurs in their classrooms could increase teacher ownership and self-responsibility for intervening [50]. Further, teachers reported a desire to remain neutral in bullying situations and to help all students involved, particularly the bullying perpetrator. Although it is important to have empathy for students who bully, teachers must be consistent in their message that bullying is not acceptable and reward students who counteract bullying, rather than students who perpetrate bullying [32]. Teachers must provide consequences for students who bully to promote an anti-bullying school climate [33].

In Phase 2, we utilized the qualitative data from the teacher focus

groups and information from a review of the relevant literature to develop the content for the STAC Teacher Training. Quantitative results from Phase 3 supported the feasibility of implementing the training and teachers reported an increase in knowledge, confidence to support students to act as “defenders,” as well as confidence, comfort, and self-efficacy in intervening in bullying situations. Increased knowledge and confidence are likely to be associated with increased teacher interventions, both directly in stopping bullying behaviors and in equipping them to support students who act as “defenders.” This study represents a first step in developing the STAC Teacher Training and adds to the literature by demonstrating that training teachers to provide support for students trained to act as “defenders” results in positive changes in knowledge and confidence which could potentially increase the efficacy of the STAC brief, bullying bystander intervention [35,50].

Limitations

Although this study contributes to the literature, limitations must be considered. First, we only collected data from teachers in one urban, predominantly White high school. Further, because of the small sample size and lack of control group for Phase 3, we cannot make causal attributions or generalize our findings to the larger high school teacher population. Therefore, it would be helpful for future studies to include additional high schools from different regions in the country with greater racial/ethnic diversity and to conduct a randomized trial to assess training effects. Finally, our findings were based on self-report data. It is possible that teachers’ responses to both the focus group questions in Phase 1 and the survey questions for Phase 3 were influenced by their desire to please the researchers. This may be particularly true for the quantitative data in Phase 3 as some of the team members who trained the teachers were present during data collection.

Recommendations

This study was intended as a first step in the development of a STAC Teacher Training. Future research on the feasibility of intervention delivery and pilot research with a larger sample and with a control group in schools with greater racial/ethnic diversity and across geographic regions are needed. Future studies investigating the efficacy of the training through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in combination with the STAC intervention are needed to examine the impact of the STAC Teacher Training on bullying outcomes.

Conclusion

Results of this study provide preliminary support for the STAC Teacher Training. Bullying is a significant problem in high school and teachers play an important role in shaping school climate regarding bullying. Additionally, teachers’ attitudes and behaviors are related to both bullying and the likelihood of students reporting bullying. Although training students in the STAC program to act as “defenders” is a promising approach to bullying intervention and can serve as a buffer against the negative consequences associated with bullying, equipping teachers to support students who intervene may increase the effectiveness of the program. This study serves as a first step in the development of a teacher training designed specifically to support students who report bullying, thereby more effectively reducing bullying.

References

1. US Department of Education: National Center for Educational Statistics (2019) Student reports of bullying: Results from the 2017 school crime supplement to the national crime victimization survey (NCES 2017-015). <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019054.pdf>
2. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2020) Preventing Bullying Fact Sheet 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/bullyingresearch/fastfact.html>
3. Denny S, Peterson ER, Stuart J, Utter J, Bullen P (2015) Bystander intervention, bullying, and victimization: A multilevel analysis of New Zealand high schools. *Journal of School Violence* 14: 245-272.
4. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2019) Trends in the Prevalence of Behaviors that Contribute to Violence on School Property National YRBS: 1991—201. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/factsheets/2019_violence_school_property_trend_yrbs.htm
5. Schneider SK, O'donnell L, Stueve A, Coulter RW (2012) Cyberbullying, school bullying, and psychological distress: A regional census of high school students. *American Journal of Public Health* 102: 171-177.
6. O'Brennan LM, Bradshaw CP, Sawyer AL (2009) Examining developmental differences in the social- emotional problems among frequent bullies, victims, and bully/victims. *Psychology in the Schools* 46:100-115.
7. Fredrick SS, Demaray MK (2018) Peer victimization and suicidal ideation: The role of gender and depression in a school-based sample. *Journal of School Psychology* 67: 1-15.
8. Hase CN, Goldberg SB, Smith D, Stuck A, Campain J (2015) Impacts of traditional bullying and cyberbullying on the mental health of middle school and high school students. *Psychology in the Schools* 52: 607-617.
9. Bauman S, Toomey RB, Walker JL (2013) Associations among bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide in high school students. *Journal of Adolescence* 36: 341-350.
10. Litwiller BJ, Brausch AM (2013) Cyber bullying and physical bullying in adolescent suicide: The role of violent behavior and substance use. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 42: 675-684.
11. Doumas DM, Midgett A, Johnston A (2017) Substance use and bully victimization among middle and high school students: Is positive school climate a protective factor? *Journal of Addiction and Offender Counseling* 38: 2-15.
12. Johnston A, Doumas DM, Midgett A, Moro R (2017) Gender differences in the relationship between bullying victimization and substance use among high school students. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* 3: 30-43.
13. Hutchinson M (2012) Exploring the impact of bullying on young bystanders. *Educational Psychology in Practice* 28: 425-442.
14. Janson GR, Carney JV, Hazler RJ, Oh I (2009) Bystander's reactions to witnessing repetitive abuse experiences. *Journal of Counseling & Development* 87: 319-326.
15. Rivers I, Noret N (2013) Potential suicide ideation and its association with observing bullying at school. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53: 32-36.
16. Rivers I, Poteat VP, Noret N, Ashurst N (2009) Observing bullying at school: The mental health implications of witness status. *School Psychology Quarterly* 24: 211-223.
17. Polanin JR, Espelage DL, Pigott TD (2012) A meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs' effects on bystander intervention behavior. *School Psychology Review* 41: 47-65.
18. O'Connell P, Pepler D, Craig W (1999) Peer involvement in bullying: insights and challenges for intervention. *Journal of Adolescence* 22: 437-452.
19. Salmivalli C, Voeten M (2004) Connections between attitudes, group norms, and behaviour in bullying situations. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 28: 246-258.
20. Bauman S, Yoon J, Iurino C, Hackett L (2020) Experiences of adolescent witnesses to peer victimization: The bystander effect. *Journal of School Psychology* 80: 1-14.
21. Williford A, Boulton A, Noland B, Little TD, Kärnä A et al. (2012) Effects of the KiVa Anti-bullying Program on adolescents' depression, anxiety, and perception of peers. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 40: 289-300.
22. Midgett A, Doumas DM, Sears D, Lunquist A, Hausheer R (2015) A bystander bullying psychoeducation program with middle school students: A preliminary report. *The Professional Counselor* 5: 486-500.
23. Doumas DM, Midgett A, Watts AD (2019a) A pilot evaluation of the social validity of a bullying bystander program adapted for high school students. *Psychology in the Schools* 56: 1101-1116.
24. Midgett A, Doumas DM, Johnston A, Trull R, Miller R (2018) Re-thinking bullying interventions for high school students: A qualitative study. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* 4: 146-163.
25. Johnston A, Midgett A, Doumas DM, Moody S (2018) A mixed methods evaluation of the "aged-up" STAC bullying bystander intervention for high school students. *The Professional Counselor* 8: 73-87.
26. Doumas DM, Midgett A, Watts AD (2019b) The impact of a brief, bullying bystander intervention on internalizing symptoms: Is gender a moderator of intervention effects? *School Psychology International* 40: 275-293.
27. Midgett A, Doumas DM (2019) The impact of a brief, bullying bystander intervention on depressive symptoms. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 97: 270-280.
28. Watts AD, Doumas DM, Midgett A (2019) Efficacy of a brief, school-based bystander bullying intervention on high school students' alcohol use. *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling* 40: 66-83.
29. Midgett A, Doumas DM, Johnston A (2018) Establishing school counselors as leaders in bullying curriculum delivery: Evaluation of a brief, school-wide bystander intervention. *Professional School Counseling* 21: 1-9.
30. Cortes KI, Kochenderfer-Ladd B (2014) To tell or not to tell: What influences children's decisions to report bullying to their teachers? *School Psychology Quarterly* 29: 336-348.
31. Bradshaw CP, Waasdorp TE, O'Brennan LM, Gulemetova M (2013) Teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives on bullying and prevention: Findings from a National Education Association study. *School Psychology Review* 42: 280-297.

32. Saarento S, Kärnä A, Hodges EVE, Salmivalli C (2013) Student-, classroom-, and school-level risk factors for victimization. *Journal of School Psychology* 51: 421-434.
33. Hektner JM, Swenson CA (2012) Links from teacher beliefs to peer victimization and bystander intervention: Tests of mediating processes. *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 32: 516-536.
34. Doumas DM, Midgett A (2019) The effects of students' perceptions of teachers' anti-bullying behavior on bullying victimization: Is sense of school belonging a mediator? *Journal of Applied School Psychology* 35: 37-5.
35. Bradshaw CP, Sawyer AL, O'Brennan LM (2007) Bullying and peer victimization at school: Perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School Psychology Review* 36: 361-382.
36. Oldenburg B, van Duijn M, Sentse M, Huitsing G, van der Ploeg R et al. (2015) Teacher characteristics and peer victimization in elementary schools: A classroom-level perspective. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 43: 33-44.
37. Veenstra R, Lindenberg S, Huitsing G, Sainio M, Salmivalli C (2014) The role of teachers in bullying: The relation between antibullying attitudes, efficacy, and efforts to reduce bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 106: 1135-1143.
38. Sjögren B, Thornberg R, Wänström L, Gini G (2020) Bystander behaviour in peer victimisation: moral disengagement, defender self-efficacy and student-teacher relationship quality. *Research Papers in Education* 1-23.
39. Creswell JW (2009) Mixed-Methods procedures. In JW Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches* 203-225.
40. Leech NL, Onwuegbuzie AJ (2010) Guidelines for conducting and reporting mixed research in the field of counseling and beyond. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 88: 61-69.
41. Hill CE, Knox S, Thompson BJ, Williams EN, Hess SH et al. (2005) Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52: 196-205.
42. Midgett A, Doumas DM (2016) Training elementary students to intervene as peer-advocates to stop bullying at school: A pilot study. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 11: 353-365.
43. Midgett A, Doumas DM, Trull R, Johnson J (2017) Training students who occasionally bully to be peer advocates: Can a brief bystander intervention decrease bullying behavior? *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* 3: 1-13
44. Midgett A, Doumas DM, Trull R, Johnston A (2017) A randomized controlled study evaluating a brief, bystander bullying intervention with junior high school students. *Journal of School Counseling*, 15. <http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v15n9.pdf>
45. Beran T (2005) A new perspective on managing school bullying: Pre-service teachers' attitudes. *Journal of Social Sciences* 8: 43-49.
46. Bradshaw CP, Waasdorp TE, O'Brennan L (2010) NEA members' knowledge and experience with bullying questionnaire. Survey instrument prepared for the National Education Association, Washington, DC.
47. Cohen J (1969) *Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences*. New York: Academic Press.
48. Holm S (1979) A simple sequentially rejective multiple test procedure. *Scandinavian Journal of Statistics* 6: 65-70.
49. Bergsmann EM, Van DSR, Schober B, Finsterwald M, Spiel C (2013) The effect of classroom structure on verbal and physical aggression among peers: A short-term longitudinal study. *Journal of School Psychology* 51: 159-174.
50. Li Y, Chen PY, Chen FL, Chen YL (2017) Preventing school bullying: Investigation of the link between anti-bullying strategies, prevention ownership, prevention climate, and prevention leadership. *Applied Psychology* 66: 577-598.

Appendix

1. What types of bullying do you observe at school?
 2. What do you think about bullying and kids who bully?
 3. What do you think most teachers at the school think about bullying and kids who bully?
 4. How do you feel and what do you do when students report bullying to you?
 5. Please describe any barriers that might keep you from feeling or being effective when students report bullying to you.
- Probes:**
- a. Are there any school-wide issues or policies that act as barriers?
 - b. Are there barriers related to impressions or assumptions about the type of students involved or the student reporting bullying to you?
 - c. Is the need for additional knowledge about what to do a barrier?
 - d. Is lack of confidence a barrier?
 6. What do you believe makes teachers come across as “approachable” so that students feel comfortable reporting bullying to them?
 7. What type of knowledge do you believe teachers need in order to feel and act effectively when students report bullying to them?
- Probes:**
- a. Do you feel like facts and statistics about bullying are important for teachers to know?
 - b. How about the negative consequences for students associated with bullying such as poor academic performance, depression, suicide, anxiety, etc.?
 - c. Would it be helpful for teachers to learn about the different types of bullying that students indicate are most common in high school?
 8. What type of skills do you believe teachers need to learn to be effective when students report bullying to them?

Probes:

- a. Strategies to use in the moment?
- b. How to work with school counselors, administration, or the SRO after a student reports bullying to you?
9. Can you share any skills you use with students when they report bullying to you that you believe are helpful to students?
10. What else would you like to share with us that we have not talked about so far that would be helpful as we develop the teacher training?

Copyright: ©2020 Aida Midgett. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.