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Investigation One: Bullying Between Older Adults: What is happening in Ontario.
Investigation Two: Seniors Anti-bullying Implementation and Evaluation Project

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10-26-2019

Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) Poster

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SOURCE Citation

Madsen, Kirsten; Franes, Liza; Rodrigues, Rebecca; and Sousa, Jordyn, "Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) Poster" (2019). *Investigation One: Bullying Between Older Adults: What is happening in Ontario. Investigation Two: Seniors Anti-bullying Implementation and Evaluation Project*. 4.
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Seniors Bullying Seniors: What is happening in Ontario?

Survey Aims: Collect data on the prevalence and nature of Senior to Senior bullying in Ontario.

Introduction:

People of all ages can be bullied (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2010; Hymel & Swearer 2015) yet data on bullying between older adults is lacking. Though early days, the anecdotal evidence is clear that the consequences for older adults are disturbing (Bonifas & Frankel, 2012) and research needs to address this issue. To better understand bullying between older adults, a partnership between the Centre for Elder

Research at Sheridan and Elder Abuse Prevention (Ontario) was established, and in 2018 adults, age 55+, across Ontario were surveyed. The results from this phase of the project are currently being used to create a resource package outlining best practices for older adults and those working with older adults, to prevent and to stop bullying. Results from the survey phase of this project will be the focus of this poster.

Operational Definition:

Bullying is sometimes called harassment and happens when someone hurts, intimidates or scares a peer consciously or unconsciously. When someone is being bullied they often have a hard time defending themselves. Bullying is usually not a one-time event. It can happen over and over again. This survey relates to bullying which is based on peer to peer interactions, and not perpetrated by a person who is in a position of trust.

Methodology

Participants:

N = 683 respondents (age 55+) (77% female, 23% male) residing both in seniors' residences (13%) and in the community (87%).

Convenience Sampling: Both the Sheridan Elder Research Centre and Elder Abuse Prevention (Ontario) collaborate with agencies across the province. Participants were recruited through these networks and the survey was advertised on both research partners' websites.

Method:

Frequencies were run through survey monkey, and chi square analyses were run to investigate variable differences.

Instruments:

Online (survey monkey) and paper surveys were primarily multiple choice, but included open ended questions.

The survey was available in French, English, Punjabi, Simplified Chinese, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish. We have been clear that this does not represent all of Ontario's diverse peoples, but the two languages first identified represent the official languages of Ontario, and the later 5 have been identified by Elder Abuse Prevention (Ontario) as the top 5 languages amongst the people they serve.

Study Limitation:

Given that convenience sampling was the method of recruitment employed in this study, it must be acknowledged that people with a vested interest in bullying, either because they have experienced it first hand or have witnessed it, are more likely to respond to such a survey. This may account for the high frequencies of bullying behaviours being reported.

Results

Experiences with Bullying:

56% reported to have **been bullied** within the **last 4 months**

13% reported to be **bullied weekly/daily**

36% reported to have **engaged in bullying** behaviours in the **last 4 months**

102% reported to have **engaged in bullying** behaviours **weekly/daily**

59% reported **witnessing bullying** within **last 4 months**

11% reported to **witness bullying weekly/daily**

Significant Differences:

No meaningful gender differences were found.

The only significant differences reported were that respondents in Northern communities ($\chi^2 = 38.098$, $p = 0.004$) and Indigenous participants ($\chi^2 = 37.685$, $p = 0.004$) admitted to engaging in more bullying behaviours than in other regions or ethnic groups.

Impacts of Bullying:

- 69% reported that being bullied was upsetting or extremely upsetting.

"I am a victim of residents bullying me and am under Dr's care and in counseling because of the trauma I have been suffering from for the past year"
— (Survey respondent)

- 77% reported that engaging in bullying behaviours was upsetting or extremely upsetting.
- When asked about witnessing bullying, 44% reported feeling angry and 18% worried it would happen to them.

Witnessing Bullying:

When asked:

"If you have ever witnessed bullying and did not step in to help the person being bullied, was that because?"

Responses were as follows:



"I would like to stand up for the person, but know, I would be the next one to be bullied"
— (Survey respondent)

Discussion

Compared to the limited data on bullying between older adults (Goodridge et al, 2017; Rex-Lear, 2011) the frequency of bullying behaviours reported here are high, reinforcing the need for evidence based anti-bullying resources for this age group.

No gender differences, either when engaging in bullying behaviour or being the recipient of bullying behaviour, were found. Unlike studies with younger adults (Bjorkvist, Osterman & Lagerspetz, 1994), this was also the case with indirect aggression.

Respondents from Northern communities and Indigenous participants reported to engage in more bullying behaviours than other regions or ethnic groups. This may be because these communities are smaller and as a result, people have less choice as to who they interact with. Further, Indigenous participants may be more likely to admit to bullying because as a people they have and do experience a great deal of bullying and abuse at the hands of people in authority.

The majority of respondents reported that bullying behaviours are upsetting. This included those engaging in bullying behaviours. This sends a strong message that older adults would rather these behaviours not happen and clearly even those that engage in the behaviour would like to be able to deal with these situations differently.

Finally, when asked if you had witnessed bullying and did not intervene, why was this, the responses were clear. People need to know how to assist and need to feel safe assisting.

Conclusion:

The data provides valuable insights to what is happening across the province regarding bullying in the older adult community. Results from this survey are being used to inform the development of resources to address this issue.

Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to: Pat Spadafora, who was the catalyst for this project; our dedicated Elder Abuse Prevention (Ontario) partners; and to all the participants who completed the surveys.

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