Facilitators and barriers to the implementation of Motivational Interviewing (MI) for bullying
perpetration in school settings

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Bullying is intentional harm of another person, repeated over time, with an imbalance of power such that it is difficult for the weaker party to halt it (Olweus, 2013). Decades of research show it to be an issue that traverses gender, age, socioeconomics, geography, and culture (Bradshaw, Crous, Rees, & Turner, 2017; Monks & Coyne, 2011; Smith, 2011). Bullying is a common experience of students in Australia and internationally, with up to one in four students reporting either perpetrating bullying, being targets of bullying, or both (Cross et al., 2009; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Thomas et al., 2017; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). Meta-analyses are clear that involvement in any bullying behaviour is associated with increased risks of physical, social and mental health problems and a variety of negative consequences costly to the individual and society (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Thomas et al., 2017). For this reason, there is a great interest in programs that may assist schools to mitigate bullying's harmful outcomes (Galloway & Roland, 2004; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014; Rigby, 2012; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

Since the pioneering school based anti-bullying interventions (SBABI) of the early 1980s, much has improved in the identification and perception of bullying, its effect, and school efforts to address it (Olweus, 2013). Meta-analyses indicate that SBABI have small overall effect sizes (e.g., reducing bullying victimisation by around 20%; Ttofi and Farrington (2011). But a more recent meta-analysis has indicated that this may be largely due to positive efficacy for younger students; by adolescence SBABI are associated with no effect, or even negative effects – that is, increasing bullying behaviors (Yeager, Fong, Lee, Espelage, 2015). Thus, despite school efforts to reduce bullying, key challenges remain.

Foremost of the challenges is that not all those who engage in bullying are alike (Thompson & Smith, 2017). Bullying perpetration stems from multiple and complex causes, resulting in heterogeneity that may impede effective intervention (Barnes et al., 2012; Thompson & Smith, 2017). Perpetration may occur due to adverse home conditions, or because of deficits in social skills (Galloway & Roland, 2004). Perpetrators may lack social skills or be highly competent manipulators (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). Some who bully others are not themselves targets of bullying (“pure bullies”), whereas others both engage in bullying and are targeted (“bully/victims”); these groups likely engage in bullying for different reasons (Runions, Salmivalli, Shaw, Burns, & Cross, 2018; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Bullying may also occur because of the predispositions of individuals, such as low affective empathy for targets (Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2015), as a result of poor supervision in schools (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000), or by values reinforced through the practices of school or home environments (Thompson & Smith, 2017). Developmentally too, the mode of bullying shifts with age: younger children typically engage more in overt forms of bullying; by late childhood, more subtle covert modes are dominant (Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015).

Current school-based interventions for perpetration

The vast majority of SBABI has focused on prevention programming. Less work has been done on how to intervene toward secondary or indicated prevention: working more intensively with students already demonstrated bullying behaviour to reduce the perpetration and associated harms. On the contrary, the most common response to bullying in Australian schools is direct disciplinary sanctions (Rigby, 2012; 2014), though reduced bullying behaviour is not always achieved (Cross et al., 2009; Eslea & Smith, 1998; Rigby, 2014; Rigby & Griffiths, 2011; Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000;

Smith, Salmivalli, & Cowie, 2012; Stevens, Van Oost, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2000; Tfofi & Farrington, 2011). Other approaches are based on counselling techniques that work to address the social problems that are thought to give rise to bullying, primarily by aiming to induce a sense of responsibility in the bullying perpetrator (Rigby, 2014); these include the support group method and restorative justice approaches. Little empirical work has addressed the relative efficacy of punitive versus counselling approaches, but that which has done so has not indicated a strong effect in favour of either (Garandeau, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2014).

Motivational Interviewing (MI) as an intervention for bullying perpetration

For some perpetrators, disciplinary measures or typical counselling approaches have offered limited or insufficient opportunities for evoking real change. If bullying is serving some personally held social goal – however dysfunctional -- bullying perpetration may be unlikely to stop because of (another) detention or a teacher’s efforts to help the student ‘see the other person’s perspective’. Recently, researchers have focused on whether motivational interviewing (MI) might serve a role in working with youth who bully (Cross, Runions, Resnicow, Britt, & Gray, 2018). MI, first used in the treatment cycle of addictions (Rollnick & Miller, 1995), aims to support autonomous decision-making and guide individuals who are ambivalent to the notion of behaviour change to find their own reasons for doing things differently. Ambivalence often derives from behaviours that are problems but that also hold an intrinsic reward value; bullying is likely to be such a behaviour, in light of the social and/or instrumental rewards that can accrue from bullying others (see Cross et al., 2018 for a full conceptual mapping of the rationale for use of MI with bullying). MI has been effective for behaviours such as medication compliance, HIV risk, and obesity (Lenz, Rosenbaum, & Sheperis, 2016; Lundahl, Tollefson, Kunz, Brownell, & Burke, 2010). It has shown its value with adolescents

(Erickson, Gerstle & Feldstein, 2005), in schools for issues such as academic disengagement (Frey et al., 2011; Rollnick, Kaplan, & Rutschman, 2016; Snape & Atkinson, 2016, 2017), and in reducing alcohol-related violence in youth (Cunningham et al., 2012).

To date, no studies have examined the feasibility of using MI to address bullying in schools. The implementation of MI with regard to bullying perpetration may face challenges at the school level. School staff members may not commit to a non-punitive approach that is predicated on valuing the autonomy of the student to motivate change away from bullying perpetration. Schools that rely on a punitive approach to bullying may believe that this approach is inappropriate. Alternately, schools already using counselling-based methods to intervene in bullying may believe that MI does not add enough to existing non-punitive approaches. The aim of the current study was to provide preliminary insight into the feasibility of incorporating MI into student service repertoires in addressing bullying. Our research question was what are the perceived facilitators and barriers to implementation of MI in early secondary schools for use with students who perpetrate bullying?

Method

Participants

In 2013, 24 government and non-government schools in Western Australia were selected to participate in a cluster randomised trial. Project schools were randomly assigned to either an intervention condition or comparison condition. Both the comparison and intervention condition schools received a whole-school bullying prevention program (De-identified reference); in 2014, the intervention condition schools were also trained in MI. School staff members in the intervention condition were provided the opportunity of on-going professional development via Motivational

Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI) coding of audio samples collected either as ‘practice’ or, where consent from the student and parent was obtained, of actual MI sessions with young people, and personalised supervision based on that MI sample. To provide insight into implementation, the project team conducted interviews in 2016 with a sample of practitioners from the intervention condition. All practitioners had been working within their school to implement MI for a minimum of one year. This requirement also served to ensure that the school staff had adequate grasp of how MI works, how it may or may not be integrated into their school processes, and thereby could provide an informed perspective. Ten participants from six secondary schools participated. Participant roles included those likely to deal with bullying in schools and included School Psychologists (3), Chaplains (2), Deputy-Principals (2), Student Services Staff Members (1), and experienced Classroom Teachers (16+ years) with additional coordination or at risk student engagement roles (2).

Measures

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to collect participant demographics, overall thoughts about MI, mechanisms and processes of MI, integration of MI within the school setting, and gaining proficiency and confidence in using MI. Participants were also given the opportunity to contribute any additional comments or thoughts (see Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). Semi-structured interviews allow for the exploration of information from the perspective of the participant, which may reveal unexpected information not previously considered by the researcher (Chadwick, Gill, Stewart, & Treasure, 2008). It is often the unintended discoveries that can lead to better understanding of ‘how’ things work the way they do (Tikly, 2015). Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker (2014) suggested the need for structure to be given to the interviews

to ensure consistency for considering comparable data across and within the six participating schools.

Procedure

Staff involved in the MI program were encouraged to refer to notes they had collected over the year to inform their recollection of bullying cases dealt with during the year in responding to the interview questions. Prior to their interview, participants were sent the list of the questions that would be asked. Interviews took between 20 minutes and two hours, averaging 30-40 minutes. All interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted via telephone, and, with consent, audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by research assistants. During transcription, identifying information was removed. Transcripts ranged from 6 – 33 pages, with a mean of 13 pages.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017) was chosen to guide data analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to discover, investigate and connect themes and patterns in the data. This method was used for generating themes relating both to the research framework (i.e., semantic level - explicit, surface meanings, relating specifically to the interview questions) as well as new frameworks which evolved through an analysis from across the data (i.e., latent level - underlying ideas, and conceptualizations shaping or informing the semantic content of the data). An inductive analysis approach was taken. In this process of coding the data, the researcher is not trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Patton, 1990) but allows the themes to emerge from the data. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to thematic analysis (familiarisation; generation of codes; Theme emergence; theme review; theme consolidation; dissemination). In any data analysis the process must consider the

researchers' epistemological stance (theoretical understandings) on the data analysed (Joffe, 2011). In the current study, two independent researchers analysed the transcript data independently – one focused on 'semantic' themes, the other on a 'latent' framework that emerged very early during the transcription process, by repeated iterations reading the interview transcripts. The latent framework was tested against the semantic analysis. Both researchers were experienced in conducting qualitative analyses for educational research projects.

Findings

As noted, our research question pertained to implementation of MI in high schools specifically for working with students engaged in bullying perpetration. Two main themes were derived from the data: facilitators of implementing MI in school and barriers to implementing MI in schools. These two themes were further divided into sub-themes. Sub-themes for facilitation of MI implementation included: 1) practitioner role and professional background; 2) instrumental support from school administrations; and 3) favourable perceptions of the MI training and implementation process. Sub-themes for barriers of MI implementation included: a) challenges arising from time pressures; (b) poor goodness-of-fit with the staff member's role at the school and other systematic processes that result in a lack of opportunity to make use of MI with the target population; and (c) preconceptions and stigma around bullying that limited recruitment, student engagement in MI, and staff decisions with whom to use MI. We first address facilitators of MI implementation, then turn to barriers to implementation.

Factors Enabling Implementation of MI in schools

Practitioner's professional background: The practitioner's professional background influenced their appraisals of use of MI in dealing with students who bully

others. Implementing MI appeared to be easier for those with experience in working with students one-on-one, whether in a counselling or a coaching/mentoring-type role.

“...I was a drug and alcohol youth worker working under a psychologist who was MI orientated. So right at the outset of my career I had exposure to MI ideas, ways of operating and very low level informal training.” [Senior School Psychologist -2301: 28-30]

Staff who had greater familiarity with various counselling techniques and/or who felt that the spirit of MI resonated with their own way of working with students seemed to implement MI more readily.

“I have found that through my experience with MI, there are a lot of similarities with the coaching process...and also some counselling work.” [Deputy Head of Senior School - 5102: 52-55]

Although it appeared to offer an advantage to those with relevant professional backgrounds and experiences, staff without such experiences also had positive perceptions of the use of MI.

“...it’s been fantastic in rapport building...We’re teachers but we’re also mentors, counsellors, yet not formally trained. So I find that it’s definitely been helpful for that whole relationship building with the student.” [Classroom Teacher -5202: 34, 52-54]

Engaging those with ‘occupational niches’ relating to counselling in schools may strongly advantage MI’s implementation. MI is principally defined as a “*counselling style*” (Rollnick & Miller, 1995, p. 325), so it is of little surprise that those with counselling experience were considered stronger facilitators of the technique.

Administrative support: Staff with better instrumental support from their school executive, and who felt their work for the project was valued, experienced greater success implementing MI.

“...I’ve had administrative support to be in the project, the work I’m trying to do with young people was valued so not too much difficulty on that front.” [Senior School Psychologist -2301: 282-284]

“We’re supported here, so my coordinator... I had their full support.” [Teacher - 5202: 226-227]

Where schools have limited resources, there tends to be a greater reliance on immediate, short-term approaches to student conflict. As the benefits of MI may not be immediately visible, the work with MI may not have been valued or prioritised as much in these schools.

Training and implementation: According to Miller and Rollnick (2009), MI is a simple in theory, but not necessarily easy to put into practice. MI embodies a complex set of skills that must be used comfortably, flexibly and responsively to evoke change. Developing real skill with MI grows through disciplined practice with feedback. Participants clearly voiced this as a factor in uptake of MI. The practical component of the training and the ability to receive feedback appeared to be the most enabling for assisting staff in implementing MI effectively.

“I think you need to be doing things like submitting your recordings [...] and having feedback... and that just does not happen by default in everyday work.” [Senior School Psychologist - 2301: 338-340]

Some interviewees described the initial experience of practising MI as uncomfortable, particularly those whose roles do not typically involve counselling students one-on-one. Being required to audio-record a practice session and submit it for feedback helped some staff to overcome this initial barrier and become more comfortable with the technique.

“I guess being put into the position of being required to capture a practice session. I feel like that was a little bit of a turning point, because it forced the issue from ‘we have been talking about this and learning this, but now you have to do it and then submit a recording to us’” [Teacher - 5201: 358-361]

Aspects of the MI training were highly valued by practitioners even those with significant counselling experience, as one school psychologist noted that in their profession the ability to receive supervision and feedback on their technique is rare and valuable.

“It certainly consolidated and fleshed out further my conceptual understanding of the approach...and with structured feedback - which is a very rare thing in our business.” [Senior School Psychologist - 2301: 261-264]

Future school based research involving training in MI may wish to consider and build upon these training related enablers to increase proficiency with MI.

Barriers to Implementation of MI in schools

Time Pressure and Administrative Expectations : A common theme underlying discussions of MI implementation was that, in light of the overall pressures of running a school, administrators expected fast results.

“I think schools are reactive. They want a quick fix. They want results. They’re busy places so things will come up and the MI might go on a second burner.” [Teacher -5201: 163-165]

“In a school environment, you’re so quick to deal with a problem, jump on the spot fire, deal with it, move on.” [Student Services Staff Member- 5102: 311]

Thus a main barrier to the implementation of MI in schools was the challenge of fitting it in to schedules in a proactive manner. Time pressures refer to the amount of time required to see change using MI, participants’ ability to schedule a regular time to meet with students, or the perception that MI is a process that should not be rushed.

“Sometimes we are reacting to a lot of crises in any one day, whereas MI I feel like you need to have a bit more time and let the kid have their own journey...” [Teacher - 5201: 129-133]

The conditioning of staff over many years to make decisions and address bullying problems as quickly as possible, usually based on school policies involving more punitive sanctions, may discourage staff from prioritizing MI as a viable solution.

“I think there were some situations where things needed to happen quickly. That’s where the technique wouldn’t work. In some situations I had to be a little bit punitive” [Teacher - 5202: 106-108]

The spirit of MI advocates for the need for autonomy in decision-making. MI is opposed in principle and practice to processes of imposing or even suggesting why to change behaviours. No practitioners indicated a philosophical opposition to this aspect of MI. Several, however, did indicate this was problematic in practice.

“...sometimes it was a very slow process and sometimes I felt like cutting to the chase”
[Teacher - 5201: 37-39]

“I think some people would’ve expected an outcome quicker with some students...what happened was quite remarkable but that took a long time [eleven or twelve sessions].”
[Teacher - 5201: 153, 158-159]

Thus, MI was considered a ‘time-consuming’ process when some students took longer to respond than others, even when ‘remarkable’ change was the eventual result. This suggests there may be limited opportunities, capacity, or willingness on the part of school leadership to invest time and resources into using MI to address bullying, despite its potential.

“Checking in on the kids and seeing how they’re going as opposed to just reacting to a problem...I don’t think schools have the capacity or budgets to release staff to be so proactive like that” *[Teacher - 5201: 181-181-182]*

These time pressures also likely impacted on staff’s commitment to learning a new approach, especially when they have more familiar techniques to use and have many other priorities.

“...there have been numerous challenges in terms of individual staff level of interest/motivation to take something new on.” *[School Psychologist -1001: 218-220]*

Time is a considerable barrier to staff committing to MI in schools. Given this may be an issue with the uptake of any effective or new actions to reduce bullying (Thompson & Smith, 2017), it may also speak to wider and systemic school challenges to deal well with more complex students’ issues with new and more nuanced interventions.

School roles and systematic limitations: Although schools self-referred to the study, presumably due to an interest in accessing professional development to better work with students who bully, for some practitioners there was nevertheless a lack of opportunity to implement MI consistently due to insufficient student referrals to them for cases of ongoing bullying perpetration.

“...since receiving the training I’ve not been in a position where I’ve dealt with incidences that would constitute bullying...” [Student Services Administrator- 1002:78]

Some staff members who had a counselling background, and who have arguably a greater potential to consistently implement and gain expertise in MI due to the nature of their role, were not usually involved in the ‘front-line response to bullying’ due to the structural arrangements and processes in schools.

“I would say that I’m certainly not front-line staff... most of the day-to-day stuff doesn’t even get to me.” [Senior School Psychologist - 2301: 17, 23]

“One of the other problems [in implementing MI] is a bit more structural...if I was up there on a day-to-day basis just catching things as they happened, I might have more opportunities to use the approach on the front-line.” [Senior School Psychologist -2301: 290-297]

It may be important for schools to consider these school roles and responsibilities and other organisational structures that may influence how chronic or unresolved bullying is addressed in schools (Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000). In our study, schools were free to determine whom to send for MI training; nevertheless, some staff indicated that their role did not involve working directly with students who bully, or who had no time to do that work.

“Generally as Chaplains we don’t see too much of the bullying stuff.” [School Chaplain - 1407: 219]

“There is definitely clash with the teacher role because you’re not predominantly in that (counselling) role...” [Teacher - 5202: 133-135]

“I think then committing the time, from a Head of House perspective, if I’m being really honest about it, (they) find it really challenging....” [Deputy Head of School - 5102: 359-361, 368-369]

The time allocated by schools to working with individuals tends to be allocated to working with those targeted by bullying, not those perpetrating bullying.

“I will more frequently spend time with students who have experienced bullying rather than with students who are [...] perpetrating that kind of behaviour.” [School Psychologist -1001: 23-24]

“Mostly at this stage I would do work with the bullied not the bully...” [School Chaplain -1406: 17]

The referral process in schools may need to be addressed so that those with expertise in evidenced based bullying interventions, like those in our study who were trained in MI, have front line access to those who perpetrate.

Some incidences of bullying were likely be addressed without the use of MI, but instead through other established punitive school processes, as in Thompson and Thompson’s (2017, p. 145) description of the ‘cooperation and support clash’ with the ‘common discipline’ procedures of schools.

“...mostly the bullies will be dealt with through the system and be suspended.” [School Chaplain -1406: 19]

Some of these school processes may have been due to a lack of a whole-school approach to implementation.

“That’s perhaps why it has been very difficult to implement it...admin have to have an understanding of what has to happen so that they can further reinforce that to other staff members.” [School Psychologist - 1405: 189-194]

Larger schools especially would benefit from increased support from the school executive and/or having a larger number of staff trained, or perhaps being encouraged to hold regular meetings discussing their experiences with using MI, and how they can improve implementation within their school.

Preconceptions and stigma of bullying: Another barrier was that students engaged in bullying were reluctant to acknowledge the behavior, and thus declined to become involved in the research. The consent documentation required for the study made explicit mention that the student had been involved in bullying. This created a barrier for some parents.

“Getting them (the kids) into the room was probably the biggest challenge and particularly there weren’t many parents that were willing to accept that their child was a bully” [School Psychologist – 1301: 144-145]

“Gaining referrals I suppose would be number 1...number 2 would be gaining consent.” [Senior School Psychologist -2301: 277-281]

An inability to gain consent from parents, largely due to the stigma attached to being identified as a perpetrator of bullying, presents a major barrier to selective prevention research on bullying. As the societal profile of bullying as a problem grows, it may be

increasingly difficult to conduct studies that focus on students who are actually engaged in bullying.

Another respondent reflected that the process of obtaining consent and collecting data from students presented a barrier to establishing trust with students who are resistant to counselling, particularly those with more challenging behaviours and/or who do not view their behaviours as problematic.

“...I felt like to work with him and to build up trust and a relationship, then getting out consent forms and giving out surveys would’ve actually hindered that process...”
[Teacher - 5201: 262-265, 267-268]

For staff in more senior positions of authority within the school, student’s preconceptions about disciplinary consequences may impede progress in MI:

“For me, where the fear of consequence and what I might or might not do to them is pretty real and high...” [Deputy Head of School - 5101: 173-175]

This speaks to the importance of establishing trust between the staff and student in determining the effectiveness of MI, and reflects also the potential of MI, once again, to rub up against typical punitive responses to incidences of bullying within school contexts (Thompson & Smith, 2017).

In other cases, limitations on use of MI with students involved in bullying may have been self-imposed by practitioners themselves based on pre-conceptions as to who might benefit.

“...my idea from the training has always been that MI is (only) for those really reluctant to change.” [Student Services Administrator - 1002: 54-55, 78]

Thus, some bullying perpetration may have been considered ‘low intensity’ or ‘at the mild end of the spectrum’ (Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000), raising concerns that this kind of bullying can be left virtually untouched in schools because interventions to address it, such as MI, are perceived to be too intensive and only suited to certain types of perpetration.

Implementing MI with students who bully in schools may involve some idiosyncratic barriers related specifically to bullying, i.e., its stigma (e.g., ‘we don’t have bullying at our school’), its covert nature (i.e., seeing more targets of bullying than perpetrators), parent or ethical consent issues (e.g., ‘my child is not the problem’), and the referral systems of schools which may only filter small numbers of students through to school-based practitioners for targeted interventions.

Discussion

As our knowledge about best practice increases (Frey et al., 2011) and the connection between bullying and ensuing mental health concerns grows (Thomas et al., 2017), the urgency to establish effective means to support students who engage in bullying is growing. It is important that students involved in bullying have access to effective evidence-based practices in school settings. But capabilities of staff to work with students likely varies (Snape & Atkinson, 2016), and best practice remains unclear. MI is a candidate approach to working with such students, but our findings indicate that implementation in this context has distinct challenges. These challenges – and the facilitators we uncovered – can inform future implementation efforts.

First, it is important to work within the occupation niche of the school staff members. MI was best facilitated by participants with skills and backgrounds aligned to counselling who were supported by the school leadership. Many school staff who work with students who bully others have no training or background in counselling. Engaging practitioners

who do have a counselling background may strongly advantage the training and uptake of MI in schools, creating a resource for schools in their anti-bullying efforts. Thompson and Smith (2017) also note this role barrier, suggesting that school executives should consider the opportunities and capacities afforded by certain roles or ‘occupational niches’ (p. 48) within schools when introducing specific anti-bullying strategies. Those with roles affording the development of expertise in MI should be given opportunities to train and become more proficient in it and be given greater and swifter access to the students who bully. This may require a review of the structural arrangements within schools. Also, those with expertise should be empowered by the school executive to work more closely (e.g., in pairs) (Thompson & Smith, 2017) with front line staff to assist them to learn new methods to address bullying, like MI.

In our experience, teacher education provides little by way of training in counselling and additional training for those with non-counselling backgrounds may be required, but should certainly be considered by schools. For example, Simon and Ward (2014) trained lay school service providers who did not have specific expertise in counselling methods to increase the motivation and achievement of low-income minority youth, leading to increased MI-adherent behaviours and high motivation to use MI was maintained. Simon and Ward (2014) did note, however, that training was intensive and required support and coordination from the school’s key stakeholders to secure beginning proficiency with MI. The current research identified the importance of administrative support for implementing MI.

External supports are also essential. First, structured support from research associates who can provide supervision is most likely to maximise uptake and implementation. Leveraging roles and maximising existing skills and commitment in professional development should be systematically addressed in implementing MI in schools.

Perhaps more crucially, support from school leadership may be critical in helping those in counselling roles. This arose as well in perceived barriers, where lack of opportunity to practise or become proficient in the MI impeded implementation. School leadership may espouse an approach like MI for bullying perpetration in principle, but in practice revert to punitive approaches. Counselling personnel were more likely to see the value of MI, recognise the opportunity to build these skills and commit to developing MI proficiency, but were often not front-line in the school referral system for bullying perpetration, nor did they feel they had roles empowered to influence school responses to bullying.

It is important to note that MI and punitive approaches are not incompatible. In MI for substance abuse, it is not uncommon for clients to be mandated to counselling as a part of their sentencing. In schools, it is possible to continue to engage in punitive responses such as suspension, but still include MI as part of the reintegration and debriefing following the suspension. In a school setting, careful administration of roles may be required to avoid engendering a meaningful distinction of roles that does not become perceived by students as a stereotypic and manipulative “good cop/bad cop” arrangement. But without buy-in from the school administration, practitioners may feel pressure to revert to existing policy responses (e.g., disciplinary sanctions alone). This was likely exacerbated by the time pressure in schools. Implementation of approaches such as MI may require an explicit process of negotiating how to fit it alongside – and not in place of – schools existing responses to bullying.

To enable the successful introduction and uptake of MI in future school applications, effective executive leadership support for it needs to be integral (Nickerson, Cornell, Smith, & Furlong, 2013). This can be challenging, as schools can be intensely busy places, with those in leadership and administrative roles routinely facing intense

instrumental and emotional demands (Maxwell & Riley, 2016). Introducing a new technique of addressing bullying—with a potentially challenging new philosophy undergirding it—may challenge the capacities of school leadership. To the extent that school administrations that can rise to the challenge, implementation may benefit.

Other factors contributed to lack of opportunity to practise or become proficient in MI. Gaining consent was seen by practitioners as a barrier due to the limited number of bullying perpetrators presenting to practitioners. The stigma of bullying made gaining consent to conduct this research difficult. As bullying becomes a more notorious social problem seen widely to be unacceptable, it is likely parents and students themselves will more vocally deny the label, even when the behaviour clearly warrants the label. It may behoove researchers to consider being more careful about how they frame the information and consent documentation when conducting studies of bullying perpetration. Venturing too far in this direction, however, may result in a blurred line between tactful consideration and deception as to the true nature of a study. Careful consideration will be required to balance the beneficence of the research and the risk of engaging in deception of participants.

Conclusion

Universal SBABI may be inadequate to address bullying perpetration that has continued into adolescence, and selected prevention efforts may be required. MI has a sound evidence base for the treatment of negative behaviours, including with adolescents (e.g., Erickson et al. 2005; Cunningham et al., 2012). In theory, MI would appear to be a suitable approach to supporting young people to find their own motivations to cease bullying (Cross et al., 2018). Because at its core it is collaborative and explicitly values an individual's autonomy, MI has value in secondary school

settings, aligning well with the needs of adolescents. Nevertheless, implementation is not to be taken for granted in schools. Our study, although restricted to a small number of practitioners who had limited access to students who bullied over the 12 months of the study, identified clear facilitators and barriers of MI. To achieve a sound evidence base for the use of MI in school settings, these barriers and enablers should be considered in the future design of investigations relating to student bullying.

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