

Abstract

Concerns are frequently raised and disappointments expressed regarding the failure of secondary school students to report bullying to teachers, thus alerting them to the plight of their bullied peers. This study examined the issue from the perspective of students and sought to determine what, if any, unmet expectations were held by students. The first phase of this mostly qualitative study set out, by means of a questionnaire survey, to investigate the experiences, emotions and observations of 1,027 second level students, in a variety of school types and locations around Ireland. The purpose of this exercise was to identify and attempt to understand some of the reasons for their choice of behaviours when witnessing bullying. Questions were included in the survey querying students' assessment of the support they received from their teachers. The second phase of this study involved a focus group discussion. Guided by questions raised during the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, the piloted and formal group discussions, involving in total eleven young adults who ranged in age from 19-22, examined schools' policies, procedures and supports from the students' point of view. As participants reflected on their school experiences, several issues were raised and gaps in current school practices were identified. The main issues of concern related to participants' perception of the lack of communication between school administration and students regarding formal school approaches to prevention and response; the common view held by many students that at least some of their teachers and senior staff didn't care; an almost fatalistic attitude among these young people that there is no way to significantly change practices in school, as they had experienced them. Recommendations resulting from this study promoted regular awareness raising exercises with students, teacher training and the manner in which it might be delivered.