

Girls in the group: What's the point?

Melanie Sehgal

Doctor of Applied Educational Psychology

Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and
Language Sciences

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Overarching abstract

This paper begins with a systematic review of the literature that looks at particular approaches and models to support girls aged 11-16 overcome the adverse effects of bullying. This revealed that girls seem to have less effective problem solving abilities in dealing with bullying. In addition, the review identified some potential criteria for group work, for example the age range, as it appeared that interventions were more effective with year 7 pupils (aged 11-12). The implications of the review for further research were considered and this informed an empirical study.

A bridging document is presented in this paper between the systematic review and empirical study. This is to provide a rationale for the research and the links to the systematic review. In addition, it provides the underpinning epistemological position that guided the research, in particular the methodological and analytical approaches.

The empirical study presented in this paper explored the benefits of a client centred approach to group work for girls, with a particular focus on 'friendship'. This was considered within the context of the Targeting Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) project (DfE, DCSF, 2008) where early intervention was considered as being crucial. The group work was facilitated by the author and supported by school staff. Structured 'change' interviews were used at pre, post and follow up stages in order to gather the participant's views on the group work. Data was also gathered at these stages using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1999). A thematic analysis was carried out on the pre and post interviews. This resulted in 3 main themes for each data set. The 'change pathway' for each participant was considered. The potential implications for future research in this field and practice as an Educational Psychologist are considered.

Key words: Bullying, friendship, intervention, group work

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What aspects of particular approaches / models support girls aged 11-16 overcome the adverse effects of bullying? A systematic review of literature

Abstract

The issue of bullying is one that concerns practitioners in schools, parents and indeed the victims themselves and can have a negative impact on self – esteem, academic achievement and often leads to social isolation for the victim. Bullying can occur in a number of forms and this can also vary between the sexes. This review looked at seven studies to determine which elements of different approaches are beneficial for female victims of bullying. Overall, it seems the results indicate that girls in Year 7 (11-12 years old) benefit most from social support compared with older pupils. Some of the studies suggested that girls seem to have less effective problem solving abilities when dealing with incidents of bullying. Social identity is also linked to how well girls can cope with incidents of bullying. Girls with a greater sense of social identity appear to be able to cope better with bullying and it can serve as a protective factor. There is also a gap in terms of research that focuses primarily on females aged 11-16 with a focus on support to overcome the consequences of bullying. These findings have implications for future research and practice and these are discussed.

Key words: Bullying, victims, social support, social identity, problem solving

Introduction

The following paper explores the range of approaches that support female victims of bullying and in particular, what aspects of these are particularly beneficial to them. Through a systematic review, literature from 2004 to November 2010, was searched in order to explore this area. This involved searching electronic databases, grey literature and citation searching. The purpose of this was to generate a piece of empirical research following the systematic review. Once relevant journal articles were identified, through the use of inclusion criteria, they were scrutinised and coded. This paper will begin with a background on the topic, including; bullying and its consequences,

bullying among girls, interventions applied to bullying and the focus of this review. This is followed by a method section outlining the search procedures adopted, in order to locate relevant articles, the results and final discussion. The implications of this review are discussed and conclusions drawn.

Bullying and its consequences

Olweus (1993) developed a definition of bullying whereby: “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, pg. 9). This definition is used by authors in a number of journals. In addition, Olweus (1993) carried out one of the first large scale studies on bullying. However, as discussed shortly the use of labels should be considered with some caution. Bullying can occur in a number of forms, including verbal abuse, physical aggression or relational victimisation (Rothson et al 2011). Verbal abuse and physical aggression have sometimes been referred to as “direct bullying” as they include directly aggressive behaviour. There seems to be some gender differences in types of bullying where girls tend to adopt “indirect” forms of aggression. Owens, Shute & Slee (2000) found that adolescent girls use a range of indirect aggressions to attack others, including gossip, attacks on sexual reputation, stealing friends and social exclusion. Boys are more likely to be physically bullied (Baldry, 2004) . Bullying can have a number of adverse effects on the victims, including student absenteeism (Rigby, 1996) social isolation (Slee & Rigby, 1993), poor academic achievement (Nolin, Davies, & Chandler, 1996) low self-esteem (Olweus, 1993) and physical symptoms of anxiety (Swearer et al, 2001).

Bullying among girls

In a report by StayingSafe (2009) it was found that girls; were more likely to feel at risk from bullying than boys, found exclusion to be a common form of bullying, were more than twice as likely as boys to report being victims of name calling and tended to agree that they would like more help and advice.

According to Besag (2006), most of the conflicts among girls appear to be related to their friendship groups. This results in particular difficulties for the victims as they struggle to escape the mesh of social relationships, within which, the bullies are nested. Girls demonstrate covert and indirect bullying in

the form of rumour spreading and / or social exclusion and increasing forms of verbal violence through electronic media such as the internet, email and mobile phones (Kowalski, 2007). These are subtle forms of attack and difficult for teachers and other adults to manage (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). This form of indirect bullying can have a number of negative consequences for those involved. Owens et al (2000) found that the spreading of gossip, betrayed secrets and criticism of each other's clothing, appearance or personality can lead to severe distress for the victims.

It is worth considering whether the use of labels such as 'victims' and 'bully' can be justified. Cassidy (2009) rationalised the terminology since they are commonly used terms in bullying related literature. However, feminist authors such as Ringrose (2006) consider such terminology as pathologising girls and lead to a stereotype of the 'mean girl'. This has resulted from the media attention on female violence. A rationale for such terminology could be based on a 'needs' based perspective. For example, Ravet (2011), suggests that the use of labels can lead to provision of necessary resources and support. This is in contrast to a 'rights' based perspective where labels lend themselves to a deficit model. This makes for a difficult situation for practitioners since some kind of identification is needed if support were to be offered to those involved with bullying. Intervention does however seem warranted given the potential implications of bullying.

Interventions applied to bullying

Although a large number of studies have looked at bullying prevention strategies, few studies have examined processes that may already be operating to mitigate the negative effects of bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2005) . One of these processes is social support. Support from family, particularly parents is one important form of social support. However, it has been proposed that as adolescents spend more unsupervised time with their peers and friends they increasingly rely upon them for support (Marini et al, 2006) . In contrast, Crothers, Kolbert & Barker (2006) found that middle school students liked teachers to be proactive in helping them solve bully – victim conflicts. This suggests the need to offer differing forms of support depending on the age of the students.

Peer support models, which include befriending, conflict resolution and peer counselling, focus primarily on improving the relationships between students (Menesini et al, 2003) . Salmivalli (2001) found that a peer counselling approach resulted in decreased self and peer reported bullying with 7th and 8th grade Finnish female students, although these benefits were not observed in male Finnish students. Key aspects of all peer support schemes are that selected students are trained to be peer supporters; and that certain students will be users of the scheme, helped either directly by the peer supporter, or by the peer supporter arranging or encouraging other forms of help to be sought and / or given to them. In some intervention programmes, focus is devoted primarily to working with victims of bullying. Fox and Boulton (2003) found in their study of a social skills / assertiveness training programme, that the intervention improved the self-esteem of 9-11 year old victims in a British school, but did not have a significant impact upon the victim's number of friends, peer acceptance, depression and anxiety.

The focus of this review: What aspects of particular approaches / models support girls aged 11-16 overcome the adverse effects of bullying?

As outlined above there appears to be a number of gender differences in the occurrence of bullying, for example the types of bullying that occurs. Taking that into consideration some thought should be paid to the most effective ways to support young people on the receiving end of bullying and this may differ based on gender. An example of this might be that if girls bully by making hurtful comments towards the victim, then the support for the victim would focus on how to manage such situations and the emotions involved. Besag (2006) carried out extensive research into the nature of girls bullying and suggested that interventions need to be considered in the light of gender differences and should be 'best for purpose' rather than applying to all cases. Besag (2006) also suggested that interventions involving techniques such as restorative justice, solution focused approaches and cognitive behavioural therapy may be beneficial. The purpose of this review is therefore to explore the literature that considers support for victims of bullying, specifically girls and what aspects of these particular approaches supports girls to overcome the adverse consequences of bullying. As discussed, not only are there differences in

gender in terms of the most appropriate ways to support victims but also in terms of age.

This review will focus on support for adolescents. The rationale for this is that the local authority, commissioning the research, wanted secondary schools to be aware that the type of support available to them, through the Psychology Team, was not limited to input of a statutory nature. In addition, a number of schools in the authority had raised the issue of friendship difficulties and bullying among girls and wanted additional support with this. By carrying out a review of the interventions already available it was hoped that this would inform the basis of an empirical study that would follow.

Method

This review utilises the systematic method described by Petticrew and Roberts (2006) and involves a number of stages, summarised in Table 1:

1. Clearly define the review question in consultation with the anticipated users
2. Determine the types of studies needed to answer the question
3. Carry out a comprehensive literature search to locate these studies
4. Screen the studies found using inclusion criteria to identify studies for in-depth review
5. Describe the included studies to 'map' the field, and critically appraise them for quality and relevance
6. Synthesise studies' findings
7. Communicate outcomes of the review

Table 1: The systematic review stages (from Petticrew & Roberts, 2006)

These stages are further detailed below.

In order to define the types of studies needed to answer the question, a scoping search of three databases (SCOPUS, CSA Illumina and Web of Knowledge) was carried out. The key words "bullying" and "girls" were used. Previous systematic reviews within the topic area were searched to avoid repetition. Gray literature (literature not obtainable through normal publishing channels) from the UK and USA were scrutinised for relevance. In addition, legislation relating to the wellbeing of children and young people was searched. The review question was developed further by considering the component parts: Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes and Context (PICOC) (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006)

<i>Population</i>
Adolescents / Teenagers / Students / Young people / School age / High school / 11 – 16 year olds
<i>Intervention</i>
Peer mentoring / counselling / Problem solving skills / Conflict resolution / drama / parental and school support
<i>Comparison</i>
With a control group / no comparison / different intervention
<i>Outcomes</i>
Resilience / Recovery / Coping strategies / Problem solving skills
<i>Context</i>
Description given on the context in which it was delivered and how and why it worked or did not work.

Table 2: Review question components based on PICOC (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006)

Three databases (SCOPUS, ERIC and Informaworld) were searched using the key words “bullying” and “victim support”. A decision at this point was made to only use research from 2004 onwards. The rationale being that the Children Act (2004) was published at this time and it is the legal underpinning for Every Child Matters: Change for children programme (2004). This act set forward that the relevant partners are placed under a 'duty to cooperate in the making of arrangements to improve wellbeing'

This search yielded 100 studies. In addition, a search using the key words “bullying interventions” was carried out. This yielded around 60 results. The titles, abstracts and in some cases the full documents were then examined in order to select articles for inclusion. This was based on specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria was developed using the PICOC model outlined above. A citation search was carried out on each of the included journals. Hand searches were also conducted on the following journals, which were judged to be of relevance to the research focus: *Pastoral Care in Education* and *Educational Psychology in Practice*.

Inclusion criteria:

- Studies including females;
- Studies involving students between the ages of 11-16 in a school setting in the UK or abroad;
- Research from 2004 to 2010;
- Directly address the issue of bullying through the use of an intervention or evaluation of an intervention or form of support; and

- Studies examining the effectiveness of interventions to support the victims of bullying.

Exclusion criteria;

- Research before 2004;
- Research not in the English language;
- Studies not including girls;
- Studies using students below the age of 11; and
- Studies with a primary focus on anti-bullying interventions as opposed to support for the victims of bullying.

Through searching the electronic databases, citation searching and hand searches a total of 7 papers were selected for inclusion in the in depth review. Figure 1 (Pg.9) shows the source of each of the papers.

Detailed description of studies in the in-depth review

Once the studies had been identified as meeting the inclusion criteria they were analysed according to the study aims and research question, study design, methods of analysis and data collection. The information from this was summarised in table 3 (Pg.13). This provided a description of each study's methods, and included information about the following:

- Participants: numbers, ages and gender.
- Study context: type of context (home, school) and the geographical location in which the study was conducted.
- Focus: whether the intervention focused on group or individual work, and programme duration (number of sessions and length of each session).
- Design: whether or not a control group was used, and, if so what kind of intervention the control group received (no intervention, or another kind of intervention). Details about steps taken to ensure experimental rigour (such as random allocation to groups) were also included.
- Methods / sources of evidence: details of who contributed to evaluation of interventions, and which kinds of measures were used.
- Follow – up: if and when follow–up measures were administered.
- Results
- Weight of evidence

Assessing quality of studies and weight of evidence (WoE)

The studies in the in-depth review were analysed using the EPPI-Centre weight of evidence (WoE) tool (2007) (see Appendix A for an example). This considered three criteria in order to make it possible to ascribe an overall quality and relevance to each study.

These weights were based on:

- A. Soundness of studies (internal methodological coherence), based upon the study only
- B. Appropriateness of the research design and analysis used for answering the review question
- C. Relevance of the study topic focus (from the sample, measures, scenario, or other indicator of the focus of the study) to the review question
- D. An overall weight, taking into account A, B and C

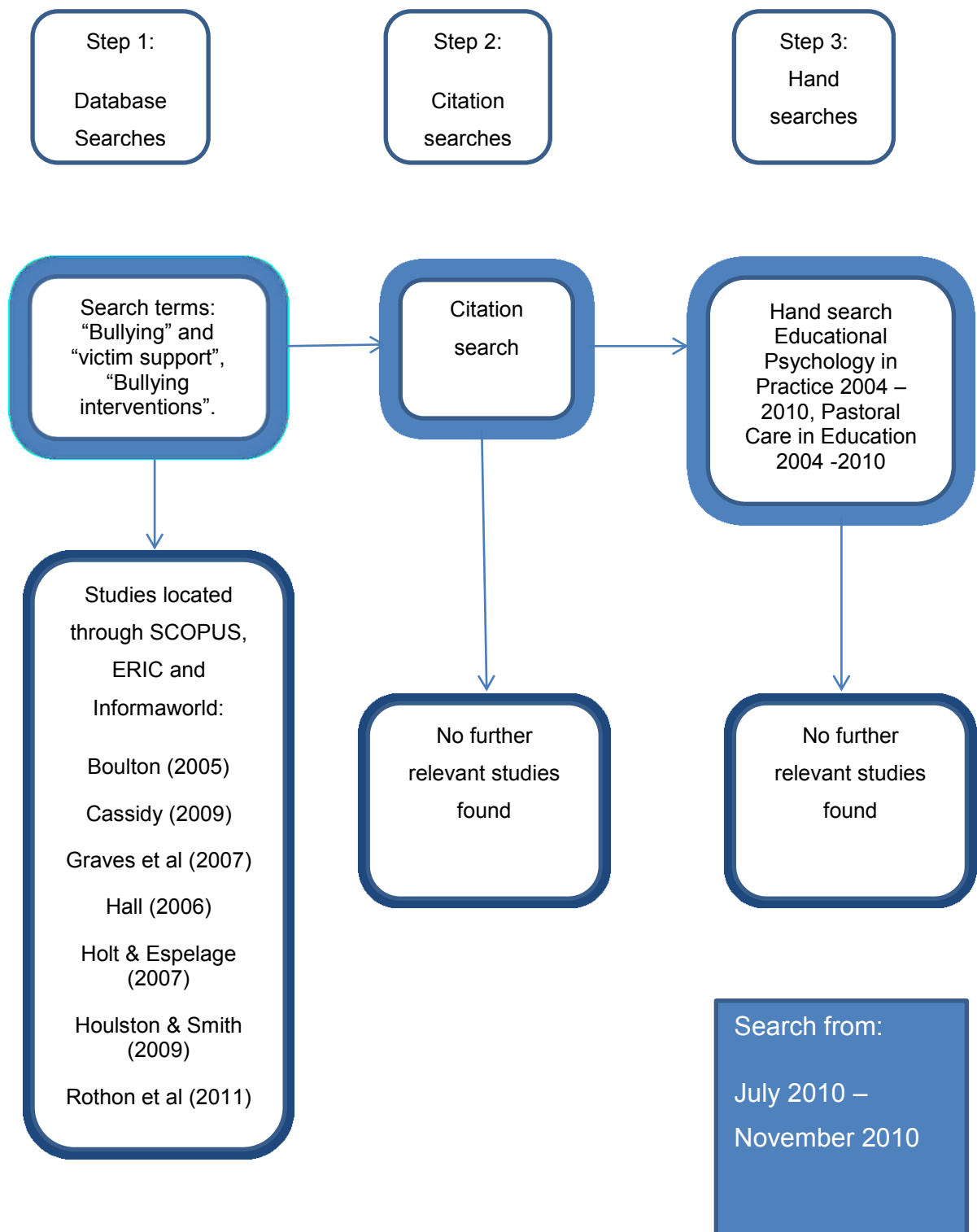


Figure 1: Diagram outlining source of papers for inclusion

¹ Please note Rothon et al's paper was in press at time of systematic review

Results

General characteristics of the studies included in the in – depth review

Table 3 (pg.13) summarises the characteristics of the 7 studies included in the in - depth review. The overall weight of evidence assigned to each is given and Table 4 (pg. 14) provides a more detailed breakdown of this. The synthesis table shows that the majority of studies included in the in-depth review were conducted in the UK (N = 4). All of the studies were conducted in schools. The majority if the studies used quantitative methods for data collection (N=5). There was only one study where all the participants were female. In the rest of the studies, four of the studies had a higher number of female participants. Sample sizes varied widely between the studies (range = 5 to 2790). Only one of the studies provided follow up data.

Design of the studies included in the in – depth review

Three of the studies used an intervention to support the victims of bullying. One of the studies was an evaluation of an intervention and the rest evaluated types of support for bully victims, such as social and maternal support. The majority of the studies obtained participants on a convenience basis. The Cochrane Collaboration has adopted the principles of the Grades of Recommendation, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) (2010) system for evaluating the quality of evidence for outcomes reported in systematic reviews. In this approach the highest rating is for randomised trial evidence. At the bottom is case series or case reports. None of the studies included in the in-depth review used a randomised control trial. Although they could be considered to have less value, it is not necessarily the most appropriate design when considering the populations being investigated. In addition, randomised trials are more abundant in the medical and public healthcare fields. The studies were rated using the 'Weight of Evidence' tool (2007), since it is from the field of Social Sciences.

Weight of evidence

Following the procedures outlined above, judgements about weight of evidence were made of all seven studies, together with an overall weight. These are

summarised in table 4 (pg.14). The synthesis table indicates that two of the studies were seen as providing high overall weight of evidence (D).

Study	Participants		Context	Focus (group/ Individual) and duration	Design	Methods / sources of evidence	Follow up	Results	Weight Of evidence
	N	Age							
Boulton (2005)	N = 99 (50 boys, 49 girls)	11-16	2 secondary schools (UK)	Individual – peer counselling service	<i>Quantitative</i> Schools selected on convenience basis. Teachers 'randomly' selected students.	Individual Interviews with service users	No	Girls use service more frequently (24.5%) than boys (18.2%). Source of help significant – more likely to go to a close friend (m = 2.71) than to the peer counselling service (M=2.30) but also reported less willingness to go to form teacher (m=2.11) and a brother or sister (m =1.94). Girls had less preference (0.0%) for same age counsellor than boys (20%)	Medium
Cassidy (2009)	N = 461 (263 girls, 198 boys)	11-15	Secondary school (UK)	Role of social identity, problem solving style and family and school context	<i>Quantitative</i> Quasi – experimental survey design	Questionnaire data from pupils in the school	No	Victims use less effective strategies for solving problems – particularly girls (F(1,460) =5.22, p<0.05) Social identity interacts with victimisation	Medium
Graves et al (2007)	N = 2,440 (1244 boys, 1196 girls)	11-17 1,022 middle school students, 1,418 high school	Middle / high school (USA)	Conflict resolution using interactive drama (Win – Win). Once a week (60 minutes per week) across 12 weeks	<i>Quantitative</i> Pre – post survey	Participatory evaluation approach – participants in the school	No	Significantly increased knowledge regarding effective strategies for conflict resolution for middle t(610) = 13.47, P<.001 and high school t(926) = 6.95, P<.001)	Medium

Hall(2006)	N =5 (3 females, 2 males)	7 th grade (12-13 year olds)	USA	Psychoeducational group model: Solving Problems Together. Once a week (45 minutes per week) across 8 weeks	<i>Qualitative</i> Pre and post questionnaire	Questionnaires – group members	No	Results indicate gained knowledge in appropriate responses to bullying	Medium / low
Holt & Espelage (2007)	N = 784 (413 females, 371 males)	Mean age 14.51 7 th to 12 th graders (12-18 year olds)	54% middle school, 46% high school (USA)	Evaluation of peer and maternal support as protective factors among victims	<i>Quantitative</i>	Questionnaires – participants in the schools	No	Significant main effect was found for sex;, females reported more peer social support (m=8.20, sd = 1.26) than males (m=7.40, sd=1.56)	High
Houlston & Smith (2009)	N =416 (all female)	11-14 years	All girls state secondary school (UK)	Evaluation of a 1 year peer counselling scheme.	<i>Mixed methods</i> Control group Longitudinal study. Pre-test /post test	Interviews (peer counsellors), Questionnaires (peer counsellors, control group), discussion groups (peer counsellors)	No	More year 7s used the scheme, more impact upon year 7s p <.001. Significant age difference of whether scheme was a good idea p<.01. Increase in self – esteem for peer counsellors	High
Rothon et al (2011)	N = 2789 (1355, male, 1434 female)	Year 7 (11-12 years) and year 9 (13-14 years)	28 comprehensive schools (UK)	Impact of social support on bullied adolescents and effects of bullying an academic achievement and mental health	<i>Quantitative</i> School based epidemiological study	Self report questions, first phase in 2001, second phase in 2003	Yes – 2 years later	Social support from friends was protective against low academic achievement. Support from friends more important than family support	High

Table 3: Description of the studies' methods, outcomes and overall weight of evidence

	A (Trustworthy in terms of own question)	B (Appropriate design and analysis for this review question)	C (Relevance of focus to review question)	D (Overall weight in relation to review question)
Holt & Espelage (2007)	High trustworthiness	High	High	High
Rothon et al (2011)	High trustworthiness	Medium	Medium	Medium
Houlston & Smith (2009)	High trustworthiness	High	Medium	High
Cassidy (2009)	Medium trustworthiness	Medium	High	Medium
Boulton (2005)	Medium trustworthiness	Medium	Medium	Medium
Graves et al (2007)	Medium trustworthiness	Medium	Medium	Medium
Hall (2006)	Low trustworthiness	Medium	Medium / low	Medium / low

Table 4: Weight of evidence

Four of the papers offered a medium weight of evidence and one offered a medium / low weight of evidence.

Discussion

This section considers what the papers offer, difficulties in carrying out this review, limitations of this review and recommendations for further research and Educational Psychologist (EP) practice.

What do the papers offer?

By carrying out this systematic review some aspects of what may specifically support female victims of bullying have been found. It appears that overall: girls seem to have less effective problem solving abilities in dealing with bullying and how to overcome the consequences. Peer support seems to be effective for girls, although there is some discrepancy in terms of the age at which girls tend to prefer it. Houlston & Smith (2009) found that peer support was preferred more by Year 7 pupils (11-12 year olds) than by Year 8 Pupils (12-13 year olds). However, Rotheron et al (2011) found that peer support was more effective in overcoming the adverse effects of bullying as children get older. This difference may be due to the pupils in Rotheron's (2011) study considering their friends as the peer support, whereas in Houlston & Smith's (2009) study the support was through trained peer counsellors. It does, however, seem to be the case that Year 7 pupils may be worth targeting in terms of offering support and this relates to some research outlined in the introduction section of this systematic review.

Graves et al's (2007) study was carried out in the USA and found that the effects of the conflict resolution intervention were greater for middle school pupils (11- 14 year olds) than for high school pupils (14 – 17 year olds). This is a similar finding to those outlined above where 11 -12 year olds seem to benefit from intervention, but in Graves et al's (2007) study this is also true up until the age of 14. This could be to do with the different school system in the USA where there is also a transition period between middle and high school.

It could be argued that the papers in this review have not necessarily offered anything new compared with the research outlined in the introduction. However, they do provide further support for providing intervention for pupils in the age group 11-16. In addition, Pellegrini & Long (2002) and Pellegrini (2002) suggested that bullying and aggression increases with the transition from primary to secondary school. Qualter et al (2007) suggest that if adolescents are helped to develop the appropriate coping skills, they may be better equipped to cope with the changes that the transition process brings. In terms of the findings of this review, girls in particular would benefit from intervention to develop appropriate coping skills in Year 7. These skills could be developed through social support. Overall, it seems that girls seem to seek peer social support more than boys.

It is worth considering carefully the findings of Holt & Espelage (2007) who were ranked as a high weight of evidence. They found that females reported more peer social support than males but also that overall, uninvolved youth perceived significantly more peer social support than bully victims or victims. This relates to Rothson et al's (2011) findings that bullied boys are more likely to exhibit depressive symptoms even though girls are more likely to have depressive symptoms in general. A hypothesis that can be derived from this is that as girls tend to seek out more social support, there is a reduction in the depressive symptoms which they exhibit, as a result. There are, however some difficulties in understanding Rothson et al's (2011) findings and these are outlined in the section 'difficulties in carrying out this review'.

Another useful area to consider as a result of this review relates to social identity and is worth exploring further. Holt & Espelage (2007) and Cassidy (2009) make reference to this and found that victims have a lower sense of social identity, since they tend to be excluded from groups that provide this. Holt & Espelage (2007) make the important point that future research on social support and bullying involvement should consider more explicitly how peers are supportive of one another. This is a limitation of the papers discussed here since they point to social support as being helpful, but not specifically *how* it is helpful.

The findings are relevant in thinking about future research in this area and implications for my own practice as an EP, when planning work at a small group level. These are outlined in the last section of the discussion.

Difficulties in carrying out this review

There were a number of difficulties in carrying out this review. Firstly, the review question focused on girls in the age range 11- 16 years. Only one study was located that included only female participants. This meant that a significant amount of time was spent trying to decipher the elements of the approaches that were specifically applicable to the girls in the studies. Secondly, as the papers were from different countries, the variables were referred to differently. For example, Graves et al (2007) refers to 'middle / high' school students. As this study was conducted in the USA, I had to check the age ranges for pupils in these grades. This highlights the issue that some assumptions are made by the authors in terms of the reader's knowledge of educational systems across the world. Some of these papers may therefore not be appropriate for an international audience.

Another issue concerns interpreting the findings from some of the papers. One example of this is in Rothon et al's (2011) findings; some of which seem contradictory. They state that there was little evidence for social support from friends as a confounder of the relationship between bullying and achievement. However, they go on to say that social support from friends was protective. They also state in their findings that bullying appeared to have an effect on the mental health of boys, but not that of girls. As mentioned earlier, it may be that girls are less likely to show depressive symptoms if they are bullied as they seek out social support. However, the term 'mental health' is not clearly defined here.

Limitations of this review

Although there was some attempt to use a transparent system to code and assign a weight of evidence judgement for the studies included in the in-depth review, these conclusions could be considered to be limited since multiple coders were not used in this process.

Another argument could be made in terms of the age range chosen which may have limited the scope of the papers found. This decision was made mainly due to the local authority commissioning the research wanting secondary schools to be aware that the type of support available to them through the Psychology Team and that it was not limited to input of a statutory nature. However, this review does highlight that it is worth targeting pupils in this age group, particularly 11-12 year olds.

Recommendations for further research and practice

By carrying out this systematic review, recommendations for future research and interventions to use in EP Practice can be made. Table 5 (pg.19) shows the aspects of interventions that warrant consideration when planning group work as they were shown to be effective or recommended for future research / group work by the authors. These are drawn from this review to use with adolescent girls to support them to overcome the adverse consequences of bullying.

Author	Aspect
Houlston & Smith (2009), Graves et al (2007)	Involve Year 7 (11-12 year olds) participants
Cassidy (2009), Hall (2006), Holt & Espelage (2007)	Incorporate problem solving approaches into interventions and empower individuals to take charge of problems
Cassidy (2009), Graves et al (2007), Holt & Espelage (2007)	Consider the importance of social – identity and social learning
Graves (2007)	Consider use of role play and the ‘model’ needs to be relevant to group members
Graves (2007), Rotheron et al (2011)	Group members need to be tracked / have some kind of follow up
Rotheron et al (in press)	Carry out in schools
Boulton (2005)	Peer counselling for girls should involve an older counsellor and possible ‘best friend’ support. Make use of pupil views in planning. Consider the importance of friends in supporting intervention
Holt & Espelage (2007), Rotheron et al	Consider the role of social support to mitigate the effects of bullying, particularly how peers are supportive of one another and when coping strategies are used
Hall (2006), Graves et al (2007), Houlston & Smith	Use of a pre / post test design to evaluate intervention
Hall (2006)	Meet each participant before group work commences. Group work structure: review previous session and summarising at the end. How to end the group in the final session. Skills of the group leader – based on the work of Rogers (1957)
Rotheron et al (2011)	Consider early intervention to stop bullying at an earlier stage

Table 5: Potential aspects of group work based on findings from systematic review

A gap in the research can be identified from this review as there was only one study that focused primarily on females in the age range 11-16. In addition, there needs to be some clarity as to why girls may benefit from social support and what aspects of it are helpful. As shown in the diagram above, problem solving and coping skills could be developed for Year 7 girls who have been on the receiving end of bullying and this could be part of a group work approach. By using a group model the girls would be supported within a social context and could potentially provide a sense of 'social identity'. Thinking about possible interventions are particularly relevant in the context of the Targeting Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) project (DfE, DCSF, 2008). By working with Year 7 pupils, there is the possibility of early intervention and previous research has found that bullying can lead to depression and mental health issues. It is therefore worth working with Year 7s at the start of their secondary education. It may be worthwhile focusing on girls who have experienced more general friendship difficulties to work preventatively to reduce the risk of victimisation as a result of a lower sense of social identity. Champion et al (2003) found that although victims of bullying had friendships they experienced conflict in these relationships. They suggested further investigation into interpersonal problems of victims.

Conclusions

The aim of this systematic review was to identify research studies that could address the question 'what aspects of particular approaches / models support girls aged 11-16 overcome the adverse effects of bullying?' The nature of bullying and the impact it can have on the victims was initially considered in the introduction of this review. In addition, bullying among girls and interventions applied to girls was discussed. I then used the systematic method described by Petticrew and Roberts (2006) in order to address the question. This involved searching electronic databases, carrying out citation searches and hand searching. The results of these searches were narrowed to seven papers using inclusion and exclusion criteria. These papers were then scrutinised and the results coded. These results were first

of all discussed in terms of what they offered. One of the approaches to support girls comes in the form of social support through friends and also through structured programmes such as peer counselling. In general it seems that girls aged 11-12 benefit from this form of support the most. It also seemed that overall girls have less effective problem solving abilities to tackle incidents of bullying. Such findings, amongst others from this review are important in considering future EP practice and research and these were outlined in the discussion.

The main gap in the research is studies that specifically focus on girls aged 11-16 and in this review and I was only able to locate one study that did this. This could be addressed by further study in order to consider in more detail if an approach that includes the development of problem solving skills and adopts the use of social support can support girls. It may also be useful to use such an approach in a preventative manner, identifying girls who have had more general friendship difficulties. In addition, consideration could be made as to how participants could be involved in planning their group work.

Bridging Document

Introduction

The research presented was carried out in the context of undertaking the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology and being employed in a local authority as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). A requirement of the doctorate was to complete a systematic review and empirical study. This document endeavours to provide a rationale for the empirical study based on the findings from the systematic review. I begin with how I defined a research focus, the political and legislative context, the theoretical framework used and why, research paradigm, epistemology, methodology, ethical considerations, reflexivity and finally some concluding comments.

Defining research focus

My interest in this area initially developed as a result of my own experiences in school and in life. This continued when I worked in a secondary school as a student support officer and developed further during the training and in my practice as a TEP. I considered girls' experiences of friendships, bullying and what supported them if they were in difficulty. It seemed that such issues could have a detrimental effect on their emotional well being so I was keen to see what might be supportive elements of interventions.

From a systematic review that explored 'what aspects of particular approaches / models support girls aged 11-16 overcome the adverse effects of bullying', I was able to identify gaps in this research area. Only one paper was identified that specifically focused on girls in this age group. In addition, there appeared to be a lack of consensus as to why social support might be beneficial to girls in particular and what aspects of it are helpful. The systematic review focused primarily on 'bullying' and further consideration was made as to how this could be developed as a piece of empirical research. I considered both the legislative context and a theoretical framework in order to develop this further. There had been a focus on early intervention and I looked in detail at the Children's Plan (2009) for the Local Authority where I carried out the study. I considered from a theoretical perspective how a specific intervention could be beneficial to a group

of girls experiencing problematic friendships and whether this could be protective for them. This will be discussed further in the next two sections.

My interest was further developed in my practice as a TEP through a piece of work that I completed as part of the Targeting Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) project (DfE, DCSF, 2008). This involved completing some group work with some Year 5 girls in a primary school. The school had said they had a recurring issue with girls in this year group having difficulties relating to their friendships, for example fallings out and name calling. It was highlighted in the Currie Report (SEED, 2002) that Psychologists can utilise small group work as part of an approach to '*Intervention*', which is one of the 5 core functions of a Psychological Service. By completing this group work I was able to consider implications for my research and what approaches might be beneficial, along with the findings from the systematic review. These included completing activities together as a group, for example the 'ideal friend' and 'circle of people', discussion with participants before commencing the group and allowing for flexibility in group work plans.

The political and legislative context

According to Thomas (1991), the impact of research on policy making depends on the degree of consonance with the political agendas of governments. I considered how this research would coincide with initiatives on both a national and local level. This research was carried out within the context of TAMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2008). This ran between 2008 and 2011 and formed the government's wider programme of work developed to improve psychological wellbeing. It supported schools to promote pupils well-being and increase capacity to build on existing universal work. It provided targeted support which could be implemented by school staff for those who could benefit from support:

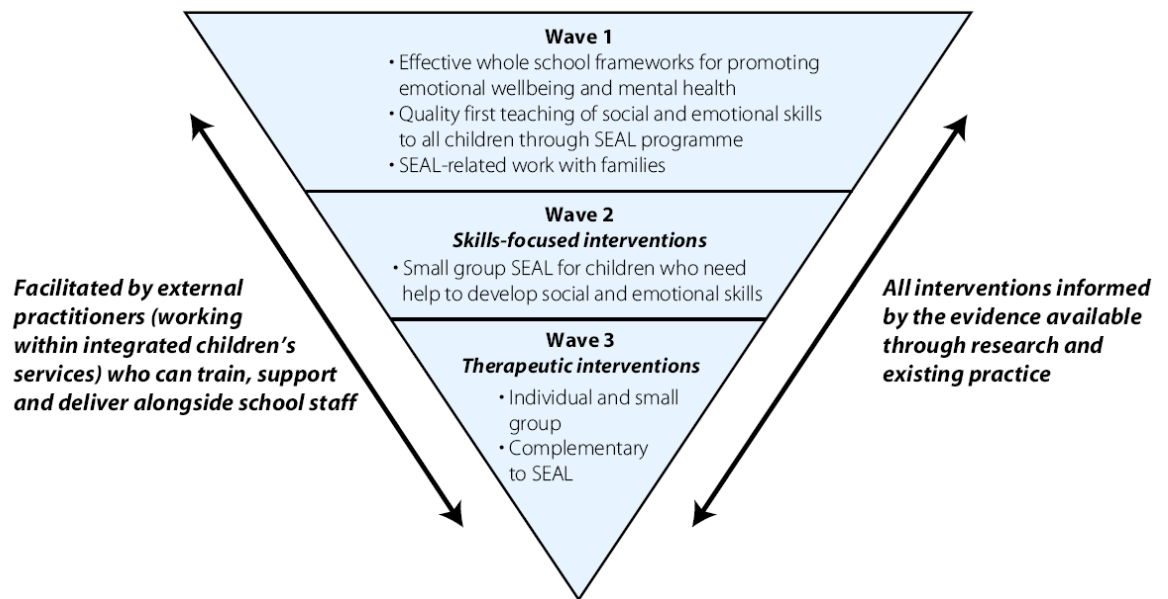


Figure 2: Three waves of mental health and well - being (DCSF, 2008)

In the local authority in which I completed the research, the Educational Psychology Team lead on TAMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2008). This meant that I could implement a small group intervention as part of a research study within the TAMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2008) context, in order to develop certain aspects of well being.

'Wellbeing' is defined in the Children Act 2004 in terms of:

- Physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- Protection from harm and neglect;
- Education, training and recreation;
- The contribution children make to society;
- Social and economic wellbeing.

In a report produced by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2007) they proposed guidance on interventions to promote:

- Emotional wellbeing (including happiness and confidence)
- Psychological wellbeing (including autonomy, problem solving, resilience, attentiveness/involvement)

- Social wellbeing (good relationships with others, not delinquency, interpersonal violence and bullying).

At a local level, wellbeing was a priority highlighted in the Children's Plan (2009) for the local authority in which I worked as a TEP. This plan also set priorities regarding inclusion, addressing emotional health problems at a lower level and consideration of low level emotional support. In addition, ensuring that any child or young person who has been the victim of bullying is adequately supported to prevent a decline in their emotional well-being was highlighted in the plan. This corresponded to the NICE report (2007) which found that peer relations, including bullying could have an impact on well being. In addition, the transition to secondary school was a risk factor for a decline in well being. In a meta-analytical review carried out by Hawker & Boulton (2000) it was found that bullying can exacerbate outcomes such as low self-esteem, depression, mistrust of others and school refusal.

The vision to address well being follows on from the priorities set in the Children's Act (2004). This underpinned the Every Child Matters Agenda (2004) which outlined five outcomes that are key to well-being in childhood and later life:

- Being healthy;
- Staying safe;
- Enjoying and achieving;
- Making a positive contribution; and
- Achieving economic well-being.

In the systematic review I considered what aspects of particular interventions and approaches would be beneficial to girls in particular if they had experienced bullying. It appeared that social support was particularly beneficial and I considered how an early intervention would be beneficial. This led to the theoretical framework adopted in the empirical study.

Theoretical framework used and why

Some of the papers in the systematic review suggested that peer social support minimises distress from bullying (Holt & Espelage, 2007) (Rothon et al, 2011) .

In addition, if this is provided then individuals are less likely to get bullied. One of the theories that came out of the systematic review was ‘Social Identity Theory’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) . According to Tajfel (1978), social identity can be understood as ‘*Part of an individual’s self –concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership*’ (Tajfel, 1978 P63). Being part of a group can contribute to higher self esteem and members will look for ways to distinguish the group favourably from other groups, described by Tajfel (1978) as ‘positive distinctiveness’. Since it has been argued that a higher sense of social identity can mitigate the negative effects of bullying or even decrease the chances of it occurring then what happens if there is a lower sense of social identity? Abrams & Hogg (1988) suggested that intergroup discrimination could occur as a result of being in a group of a lower status and thus individuals attempt to increase their own self esteem. I considered how friendship bonds within a group could be strengthened in order to develop a sense of belonging and reassurance in the group (a friendship group).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) suggests that those close to an individual can have a significant influence on their development. In his social ecology model (1979) he proposed that children have a series of systems around them which influence their development. This included the most immediate *microsystem* (friends and family) to the remote shapers in the *exosystem* (such as the extended family and the media) and finally the *macro system* (including culture and the political system):

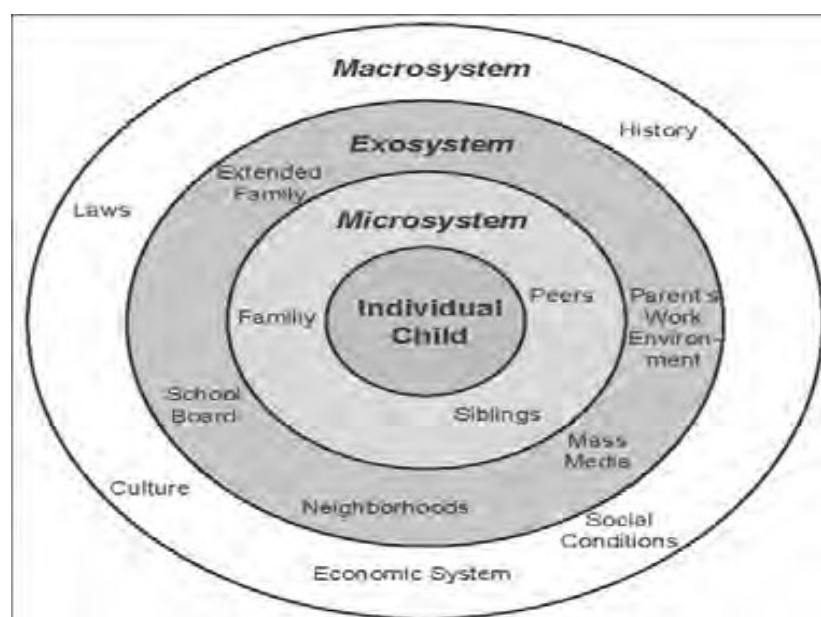


Figure 3: Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model showing environmental influences on the child

Within his model the peer group has an important part to play in the development of an individual. This would fit with the notion that groups can provide a sense of belonging and increase self – esteem.

A particular time when a sense of belonging might be challenged is during the transition from primary to secondary school. At this point there is a change in the systems around the young person and potentially the groups in which they are part of. Zeedyk et al (2003) found that the main concerns regarding the transition included bullying and peer relationships. In addition, Ashton (2008) found that social concerns, for example friendship issues and concerns around bullying were more important than academic concerns at the end of Year 6.

Some of the papers in the systematic review suggested that specific interventions to support the ‘victims’ of bullying are more beneficial for Year 7 pupils when they are in secondary school (Houlston & Smith, 2009), (Graves et al., 2007). Some studies have also found that girls have more concerns than boys; both pre and post transition (Anderson et al, 2000, Rice et al, 2011). In a study by Hall (2006) client centred skills were adopted in group work that aimed to support the victims of bullying. Carl Rogers (1957) proposed six conditions that are necessary and sufficient conditions for the process of personality change. These included psychological contact, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding of the client. Rogers (1951) suggested that the group situation ‘brings into focus the adequacy of interpersonal relationships and provides an immediate opportunity for discovering new and more satisfying ways of relating to people’ (pg. 289).

I saw myself as being an active agent in the research and did not stand apart introspectively. This led to the methodological approach outlined below, where I was interested in studying the individual in preference to the group. As a result, I took on an idiographic approach. In this approach to research, there is an attempt to understand an individual case rather than the general and universal case (Cohen et al, 2007). I was interested in this particular group of girls and what was important to them and was aware that their realities and beliefs would not necessarily be the same as others.

Research paradigm

According to Willig (2008) we need to know the objectives of the research and the kind of knowledge it aimed to produce for it to be evaluated in a meaningful manner. In the study I was interested in whether a specific approach to group work could allow me to capture data on the relationships within the group and what were the supportive elements (if any) in participating. This related to *ontology*; what there is to know (Willig, 2008). This led me to consider my *epistemology*; *how, and what can we know?* (Willig, 2008). The participants had their own thoughts about this and I was aware that the tools I would use to attempt to elicit these views would lead to my interpretation of their own reality. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that a paradigm is ‘...a distillation of what we *think* about the world (but cannot prove).’ (p15). From a critical realist perspective I wanted to gain an understanding of what was going on for these girls but with the awareness that the data I gathered may not provide a direct access to that reality (Willig, 2008).

Epistemology

Roy Bhaskar has been well associated with the philosophical approach to the social and natural world. Bhaskar (1978, 1989), distinguished between the empirical, the actual and the real (including mechanisms, events and experiences). When engaged in social science work we are interested in mechanisms and an understanding of what produces outcomes at the level of direct experiences within the empirical. This involves working out what mechanisms and powers produce the outcomes. In the study I wanted to find out what it was, if any, made taking part in the group lead to benefits for the participants. I had theorised that it would lead to increased social identity but I also wanted to see if there were other mechanisms taking place.

The participants taking part in the research were all female. I questioned from my epistemological position how this could be rationalised. New (2005) suggests that critical realists see sexual difference as ‘natural’ in that its ontology is not primarily socially caused. Gender is a social emergent property of a person and affects their agency in terms their capacities, opportunities and motivations. In addition, some social structures are gendered. Eichler (1988) notes that amongst the sources of sexism in research include *gender*

insensitivity: ignoring sex as a possible variable and *overgeneralisation*: when a study deals with only one sex but presents itself as generally applicable. Clegg (2006) proposes that we must consider the question of woman and whether there are ways of speaking about women which do not suppress difference. In addition, critical realism offers a rich resource for thinking about feminist theorising and empirical work analysing the relationship between gender and education. In this thinking something can be done to change injustice and inequality. Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged the notion of the 'male as the norm' in research. As described by Willig (2008), research in the 1960's and 1970's to establish epistemological perspectives involved the use of men and as a result perpetuated inequalities in society. In addition, it assumed that the findings for men would be the same as that for women. In my research I was interested in the experiences of girls and thus it would not have been fitting to include boys.

Methodology

A case study design was utilised in the study and in this approach the assumption is that the world is complex and that patterns of behaviour and experience are not expressed in a predictable fashion (Willig, 2008). This fits with a critical realist view of the world. They can make use of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Willig, 2008)

A mixed methods approach was adopted in order to gather data from the case study. According to Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004), this is when the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques and methods into a single study. This provides multiple approaches to answering the research questions rather than restricting the researcher's choices. In a critical realist framework it provided the opportunities to understand the mechanisms within the group and understand their own experiences. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) provide an example whereby the researcher may want to qualitatively observe an interview and supplement this with a closed-ended instrument in order to systematically measure relevant factors highlighted through previous research. This fits with the rationale for the case study I carried out. According to Willig (2008), case studies can make use of a range of data in order to approach the case from a range of perspectives (triangulation). In addition, they have a focus on change and development over

time. In this instance it was related to the potential changes as a result of the group work.

By using two types of approach it was able to fit a dual purpose. According to Willig (2008), qualitative research can give people a 'voice' and interpret what they have said to explain the reasons why they may have said it. By completing the change interviews with the participants, they were given a voice about their own experiences, change and causal factors. As a result of this type of data collection, overarching themes were generated using thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), this is a method that is used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within a data set. It organises and describes it into rich detail and can interpret particular aspects of the topic of research. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that the researcher is active in identifying the themes from the data and should acknowledge their own theoretical position. The theoretical framework for the study was outlined earlier and the generation of themes from the data allowed me to explore this further. In an evaluation ('Me and My School, 2011) of the TAMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2008) project, themes were also drawn through the use of qualitative data.

The second purpose came from utilising quantitative data. According to Mathai (2003) outcome evaluation is a complex issue and information gathered from multiple sources in a number of domains is essential. As discussed the study was carried out within the context of TAMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2011). In the 'Me and My School' (2011) evaluation, the SDQ was used for the secondary population to assess the mental health outcomes for the participants. In this study I wanted to add some weight to the qualitative findings and the SDQ data could provide this at each stage of data collection. This was due to it being able to calculate the change in SDQ score. From a practical perspective, it meant that it could be administered to parents and staff without having to physically meet them to gather the data.

Ethical considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations that needed to be made when carrying out the study. These were initially addressed through completion of documentation for the ethics committee and this considered issues such as confidentiality. I also ensured that I adhered to the Health Professions Council's

standard of ethics (2008) and the British Psychological Society's code of ethics (2010). Beyond this, I thought about what it would mean for those taking part and how to manage this carefully. The study involved the use of children and interviews. According to Cohen et al (2007), when understanding children it is important to try and do this from their point of view rather than through the eyes of an adult. Considerations such as cognitive and linguistic development, attention and concentration span, ability to recall, life experiences, what they consider to be important, status and power should be made. I was concerned with making the participants feel comfortable and at ease in the interviews and to build a trusting and honest relationship. Guillemin & Gilam (2004) discuss how to ensure that those taking part in the research are not being used as a means or tools by the researchers. In contrast, it is a joint process where they become participants rather than subjects. Part of this was to find out, through their own experiences what might be beneficial to them in the first instance which may go on to benefit others. This could have been achieved through interviews alone as this could be viewed to be therapeutic in itself but I felt by taking part actively in an intervention that they had some control over would be additionally supportive. Indeed, the principal of beneficence (obligation to act in ways that benefit other people, or at least in ways that do not harm them) is highlighted in a number of documents; The British Psychological Society (2010), U.S. Common Rule, (2001) Commonwealth of Australia (1999), and the Medical Research Council of Canada et al (1998).

An approach that involves the active part of the participant is in the case study approach which was adopted in this study. Willig (2008) discusses how the requirement in this approach to discuss sensitive issues through interviews or taking part in discussion can elicit thoughts that may not have been experienced previously. This may bring to the fore a number of emotions and the researcher is responsible for the effect the study may have on the participants. It may not always be possible for the researcher to deal with these consequences. In this study this was managed by eliciting the support of staff in school to attend the group work sessions and be close by when individual interviews took place. In addition, a number of the sessions discussed who they might seek, inside and outside, of school for additional support.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be defined as the awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process (Crotty, 1998). I considered my own identity as a white, female 28 year old (at the time of data collection) TEP who had come to be interested in the topic of research as a result of my own related experiences. According to Ezzy (2002) the personal experience of the researcher is integral to the process. I felt this led me to define a research topic and consider what might be beneficial. Griffin (1991) discusses how her work with young women moving from school into the work place 'elicited a feeling of friendship and shared experience, of exchanged information and developing rapport' (pg. 112). I felt that it was a shared experience in so far as I facilitated the group and listened to the discussions. However, as a TEP I considered my professional role and did not discuss in detail my own experiences. I felt that the group was for discussion about their own experiences and as an adult I needed to be aware of how they might manage hearing about my experiences.

My own experiences impacted on the shift from bullying in the systematic review to working from an early intervention approach and considering friendship in the empirical study. In my own experience I experienced bullying at middle school. However, when I made the transition to upper school I formed a group of friends who I related to strongly. I found this to be protective and supportive. I have reflected how supporting groups of friends may act as buffer to prevent incidents of bullying.

Concluding comments

In this document I have attempted to provide a rationale for the empirical study which I undertook based on findings from a systematic review. I have discussed a number of considerations that I needed to make before commencing the study based on my world views and what I felt to be important for the participants.

Client centred group work: What are the potential benefits for 11-12 year old girls and their friendships?

Abstract

This study follows on from a systematic review of literature into the supportive aspects, of models and approaches for girls aged 11-16 to overcome the adverse effects of bullying. This study considered a group work approach utilising client centred skills and what aspects of it could be beneficial, with an initial emphasis on friendship. Interview data was gathered prior to the group work commencing, once it had finished and at six month follow up. A thematic analysis was conducted on this pre and post data. This resulted in 3 main themes for each data set. The 'change pathway' for each participant was considered. It appeared that the group work was beneficial to participants and the impact continued at six month follow up. The benefits included increased problem solving skills and stronger bonds within the group. The data also gave an insight into the contributing factors of difficulty within the group. Data was also gathered using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1999) at pre, post and follow up. This showed an overall mean decrease in the participant total score. The potential implications for future research in this field and practice as an Educational Psychologist are considered. Limitations of the present study are discussed and conclusions drawn.

Key words: Bullying, friendship, client centred, group work, thematic analysis, SDQ

Introduction

According to Berndt (2002), a high quality friendship is characterised by 'high levels of prosocial behaviour, intimacy, and other positive features, and low levels of conflicts, rivalry and other negative features' (Pg. 7). However, it is difficult to provide an adequate definition of the particular features of dyadic friendships given that they change in characteristics over the course of development (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Stability of friendships is considered as important, and this is defined by maintenance of a relationship over time (Poulin & Chan, 2009). The stability of such relationships becomes

more important to individuals with age. According to Berndt (2002), some of these features are recognised by adolescents but not by young children. In addition, self disclosure in the adolescent years becomes a hallmark for friendship.

Friendship instability appears to be relatively common in early adolescence (Poulin & Chan, 2009). This is despite the importance of the need for friendship stability increasing with age. One possible reason for this is the changes that the transition to secondary brings. Zeedyk et al (2003) found that although pupils look forward to making new friends, peer relations was also high on the list of concerns. Banerjee and Dittmar (2008) suggested that peers become more important than parents as they move towards adolescence. An explanation for this is that peers can provide an identity when part of a group and adolescents tend to spend more time in groups. In Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. The groups with which we belong to are an important source of pride and self esteem.

Besag (2006) suggests that the establishment process for girls within the peer group is particularly problematic. Besag (2006) suggests this is a result of the friendship bonds which can often be fractious in nature, resulting in frequent falling outs. It is possible that the level of emotional investment in these friendships means that they are less likely to seek relationships elsewhere. It has been demonstrated that girls tend to be more distressed than boys when imagining the potential end to a friendship (Benenson & Christakos, 2003). Girls also tend to change friends when they perceive a violation of friendship norms (Degirmencioglu et al, 1998). It could therefore be argued that the emotional well being of some girls is jeopardised by the fractious nature of their friendships.

Emotional well being has been high on the agenda in recent years in the UK for children and young people. UNICEF's Report Card 7 (2007) put the well being of children in the UK high on the agenda as a result of the specific indicators of well being. These were:

- Material well being;

- Health and safety;
- Educational well being;
- Family and peer relationships;
- Behaviours and risks; and
- Subjective well being.

The UK was 21st amongst the 'rich' countries for family and peer relationships and also for overall wellbeing.

The psychological wellbeing and mental health of children, young people and families was a focus of the Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS) programme (DfE, DCSF, 2008). The World Health Organisation (2004) considers positive mental health as individuals being able to recognise their abilities, see positives, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and contribute to their community. Long lasting and mutually fulfilling relationships is an important component of this. TaMHS was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and its predecessor (DCSF) and ran between 2008 and 2011. The aim of the programme was to develop interventions and targeted support for children (aged 5 to 13) at risk of developing mental health problems. It supported the promotion of wellbeing and social and emotional development by building capacity within schools. According to NICE (2007), psychological wellbeing includes resilience, autonomy, attentiveness/involvement and the capacity to problem solve.

Within this TaMHS (DfE, DCSF, 2008) framework, could a specific intervention for 11-12 year old girls be developed with a focus on friendship? Given that children's friendships are important in supporting emotional development, difficulties with them could have a detrimental effect. Boulton et al (1999) found that young people who have a reciprocated best friend are much more likely to be protected from aggressive acts or social exclusion on the part of the peer group.

² Well being indicator – 21st (out of 21) = very low well being, 1st = very high well being.

Figure 4 shows a model (the researcher's) to provide a rationale for group work intervention.

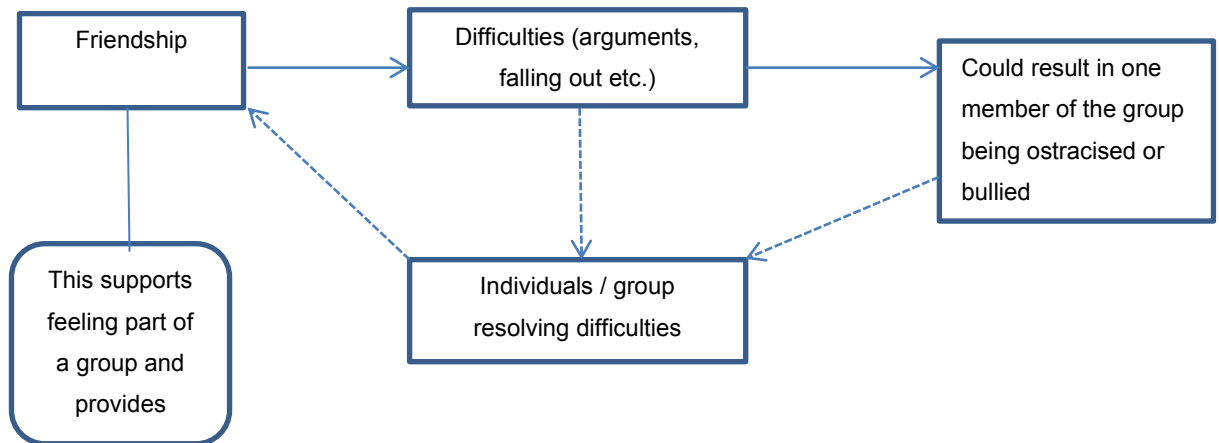


Figure 4: Model showing rationale for group work

In this model the assumption is that by resolving difficulties within a group of friends, there is avoidance of particular members being ostracised and potentially bullied or victimised. This could be facilitated by an intervention if the group are frequently 'falling out' or having difficulties. In that sense there would be some kind of preventative approach to avoid what has been described. That is not to say that if it does get to the stage of individuals being ostracised that intervention may not be beneficial. This model is supported by Rothon et al (2011) who found that a high level of support from friends helped mitigate the negative effects of bullying.

It has been argued there are some advantages of group work over individual work as a form of intervention. Squires (2002) suggested that group work supports individuals to feel they are not alone in experiencing certain feelings or acting in different ways. It helps normalise such feelings and behaviours and the group provides alternative viewpoints and peer support. It has been suggested that adolescents rely more heavily on support from peers and friends since they spend more time with them than with their parents (Marini et al., 2006). However, it has also been found that middle school pupils like teachers to support them to resolve conflicts (Crothers et al., 2006). It may therefore be beneficial to join the two approaches where peer support is facilitated via an adult. Peer support models, which include befriending, conflict resolution and peer counselling focus primarily on improving the relationships between students (Menesini et al., 2003).

In terms of the nature and content of group work utilising peer support, the use of client centred skills warrants some consideration. The client centred approach derives from the work of Carl Rogers (1957) in his approach to therapy. This was based on the view that people have an inherent drive to achieve their potential. Rogers (1957) proposed that within the therapeutic relationship there needs to be specific conditions in order for this potential to be achieved. This included unconditional positive regard for the client, empathy and genuineness. Since his initial work, Rogers' (1957) client centred therapy has developed into a broader therapeutic orientation. Some authors have suggested that other therapeutic approaches can be informed by the three core conditions of client centred therapy (Josefowitz & Myran, 2005). This approach also lends itself to the participants having a voice in terms of what they would like to achieve from taking part and in terms of the content.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provided the first legally binding international instrument to acknowledge the human rights of children. Article 12 of the Convention specifically outlined a child's right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter or procedure affecting them. The Children Act (HMSO, 1989) similarly stressed the importance of giving all children "a voice". Taking this into consideration, it would be important that the group sessions would involve a collaborative exchange, taking on board the views of the participants as they went along rather than the researcher dictating what would take place. In addition, The Every Child Matters (2004) agenda demonstrated an explicit commitment to hearing and valuing the views of young people.

The following paper aims to explore the potential benefits of a group work intervention for girls within the context of TaMHS (DfE, DFES, 2008). The use of client centred skills is adopted to ensure that it is client led with the adults present as facilitators. In addition, the activities and discussions are based on the views of those in the group.

Methodology

Research design

A case study approach was utilised involving a group work intervention within a school context. Pre, post and follow up data were gathered yielding mixed data. The rationale for this was to gather data regarding the relationships within that particular group, the effectiveness of the intervention and evidence of change. As noted by Robert Yin (1994), case study involves the investigation of phenomenon within a real life context using a range of evidence.

Participants

Five participants for this study were drawn from a secondary school in the North East of England. The school was selected opportunistically as one that formed part of the researcher's workload as Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). This meant the researcher had an understanding of wider issues in the school which had previously been discussed with staff and this included the fractious nature of girl's friendships and the impact this had. These included frequent reports to staff about arguments and the girls not always feeling able to resolve conflicts independently.

The researcher met with two members of support staff and the Head of Year 7 to discuss the research; whether they thought it would be beneficial for a group of year 7 pupils and also whether it would be useful to inform their own practice. The research was approved by the head teacher. The support staff selected a group of five Year 7 girls (aged 11-12) who they judged would benefit from a group work intervention with a focus on 'friendship' and 'problem solving'. The starting point for this was a girl who regularly sought their advice regarding her friendships and staff believed these friendships were starting to have an impact on her academic achievements. The group was then composed of her friendship group (See Appendix B for an account of participant selection).

Ethical issues

Ethical approval was granted through Newcastle University Faculty of Humanities Social Science Ethics Committee. Each of the participants were spoken to individually and told about the nature of the research. This was explained carefully and clearly and they were given information sheets (see

Appendix C) and consent forms and asked to return these to school if they wanted to take part. The participants, parents and staff members supporting the group all completed consent forms in order to agree to take part (see Appendix D, E & F). Confidentiality and the right to withdraw were discussed throughout the research. They were informed that any information gathered electronically would be anonymised and digitally recorded data would be kept in a locked cupboard and destroyed following transcription.

Research questions

- Would group work be helpful to a group of Year 7 girls?
- Could data be captured on relationships within that group?
- Could it be ascertained as to what they valued as important, in terms of friendships and what supports them if they are faced with difficulty?
- How could they be involved in planning their group work?

Research methods

Measures

Before the group work sessions commenced, each of the girls was interviewed using a client change interview protocol, adapted from Elliot (1999) and Lynass et al (2011) (see Appendix G). This was used to gather data to develop an understanding of the predominant themes regarding friendship, what participants wanted to change and how they thought these changes might be brought about. Each of the girls completed a self report Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1999). This is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire which has twenty- five items using positive and negative questions. As noted by Muris et al (2003) a not too time consuming questionnaire is needed. It was used to provide a quantitative measure, since the TaMHS (DfE, DFES, 2008) project was concerned with improving mental health outcomes. It was also later used as a measure in the 'Me and My School' (2011) evaluation of TaMHS. In addition, it was beneficial to see if the intervention had any effects not necessarily expected, for example on 'conduct'. The initial focus of the study concerned 'friendship but the researcher did not want to limit the focus and was interested in what other themes might be explored. Parents or carers and teaching staff were also asked to complete an SDQ (Goodman, 1999) for the participants. Unfortunately, these were not

completed by school staff. The SDQ is also useful in making the data accessible to other professionals (for example clinical psychologists) since it is a widely used tool. Goodman (2001) found that the reliability of this tool was generally satisfactory and showed retest stability. This was important for the study as a pre /post test and follow data collection took place where measures were repeated.

These measures were repeated one week after the final group, with another version of the client change interview protocol adapted from Elliot (1999) and Lynass et al (2011) (see Appendix H). The SDQ was returned by only two of the parents / carers.

Personal reflections were also kept on a weekly basis by the researcher to consider what it was like to be a researcher, facilitating the group and to think about own assumptions and contrast with what it was really like. Staff supporting the group were also asked to keep weekly reflections, using a worksheet to aide thinking (see Appendix I). This was completed for only two of the sessions.

The group work sessions ran over a six week period, each lasting an hour. Burton (2006), suggested that group work consisting of six sessions is reasonable for Educational Psychologists (EPs) since this provides time to develop relationships within the group. A member of support staff was present when the sessions took place to support the group and to increase the skills of that staff member. After the post measures had taken place each of the participants was sent a therapeutic letter (see Appendix J for an example).

A follow up study was completed six months after the post intervention measures. This involved meeting with each of the participants, completion of a self report SDQ and a follow up interview, adapted from Elliot (1999) and Lynass et al (2011) (see Appendix K). In a study by Graves et al (2007), they suggested that pupils should be tracked. In addition, Baginsky (2004) also suggested in her review of peer support that thorough evaluations should be used to understand what makes it work.

The group work

The first group work session began with establishing ground rules that were formulated by the participants. The issue of confidentiality was discussed. Ideas were gathered in this session regarding what they thought might be useful activities and discussions. Subsequent sessions were devised on a weekly basis following a structure outlined in Table 6.

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
9.10 – 10.10	MS	Introductions: 1) Who we are. Group members to give one word to describe how they felt when they walked in the room. 2) Reminder of the purpose of this group and the research.	Stickers	To get to know each other's names. To find out a little about each other.
10.10 – 10.30	MS	Ground Rules Come up with a set of ground rules for the group together.	Paper and pens	To ensure the smooth running of the group.
10.30 – 10.50	MS	'Circle of People' As a group we will think about the different people who are important in our lives.	Circles and pens	To prompt discussion about the people who support us in our lives. In addition, how being part of this group might offer additional support and reassurance. We will think about how this might change as you get older.
10.50 – 11.10	MS	Round up of today's session and what has been important. Discussion of pupils hopes for the group. Consider ideas for future sessions		Share ideas for activities / what might help.

Table 6: Example of a group work plan (See Appendix L for full set)

Parton & Manby (2009) described a typical group session in their research where it would begin with a social skills game as an icebreaker, followed by exercises, role plays and further games all aimed at exploring that week's theme, for example friendship skills.

Although the structure was planned each week, the nature of the activities undertaken in the group was determined by the participants. Ideas for these were generated in the pre change interviews and at the end of each session. Activities were then prepared and taken to the sessions and explained to the girls. They were asked if they were happy to use them. Often the activities were simply a starting point for discussion. The activities and discussion utilised skills and ideas from EP practice, such as solution focused questioning and approaches from person construct psychology. These approaches were

integrated into a client centred approach where the skills utilised by the researcher in facilitating the sessions included skills of paraphrasing, reflecting feelings and summarising (Rogers, 1951). It was hope this would create the conditions needed to make it easier for participants to share their experiences. It was suggested by Josefowitz & Myran (2005) that a that the three core conditions of a person centred approach can inform more directive approaches for intervention, for example cognitive behaviour therapy.

In terms of terminating the group, some time was left at the end of the final session to discuss what they had found helpful, what strategies they would use in the future and how they would support each other.

Data analysis

Results from the pre and post change interviews were analysed separately. Data was gathered using a digital voice recorder during structured interviews led by the researcher with the five individual participants in the study.

Subsequently, the data was transcribed and a thematic analysis carried out following methodology described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data sets were analysed to create individually coded data extracts. Every time a new concept arose in the data it was given a numerical code. When a different concept arose it was given a new number. The different concepts, with corresponding coded data were recorded in a table (see Appendix M and N).

This was to ensure that the themes came from the data, rather than as a result of the questions in the interview.

Results

Thematic analysis data

Pre change data

Eleven initial themes were generated at this stage of the analysis for the pre change interviews:

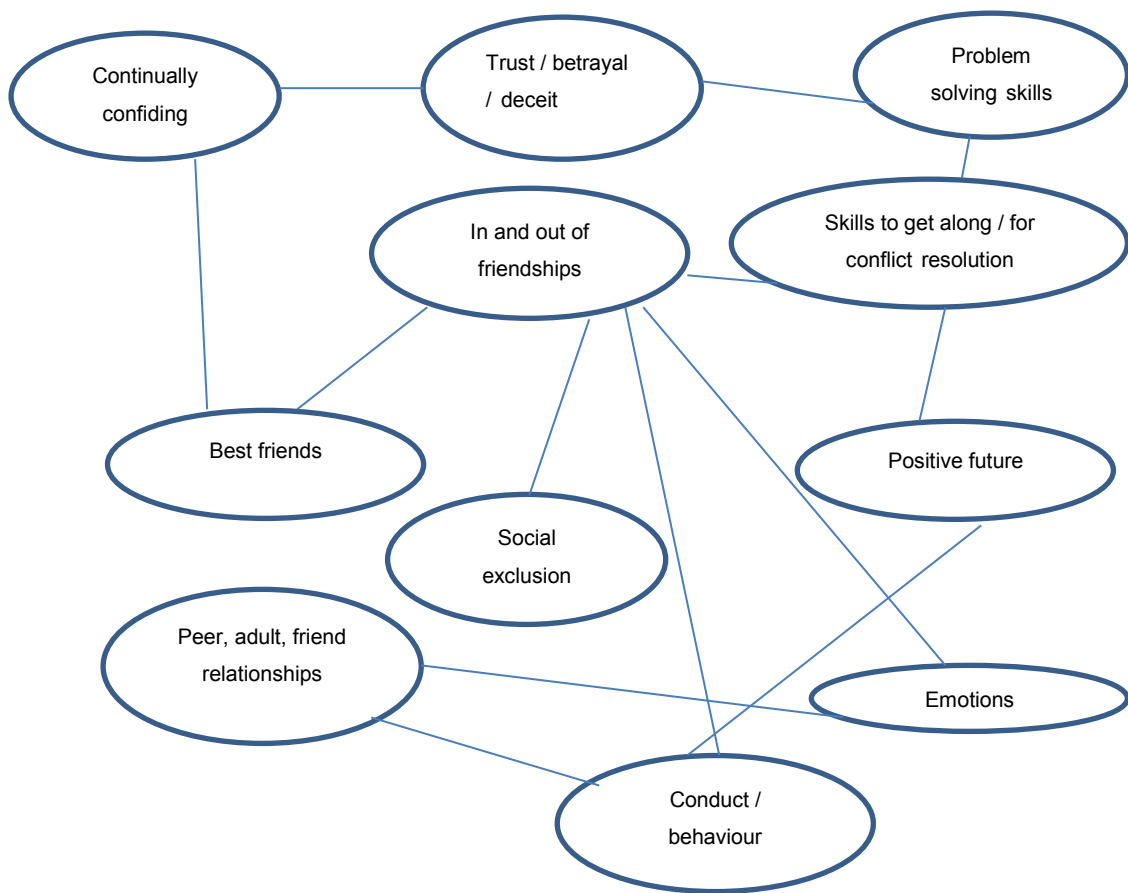


Figure 5: Initial thematic map for pre change interviews

Further consideration of the relationships between codes and themes at different levels led to the identification of 3 main themes; problematic aspects of friends / peer relationships, personal control and hopes for group work. Each of these themes comprised varying sub-themes, for example, sub-themes within personal control included conduct and behaviour. These can be seen in Table 7 (pg. 46)

Themes		Sub themes	
Problematic aspects of friendships / peer relationships	Trusting others and betrayal / deceit	Frequency of arguments and friendship breaking down	Social exclusion as a result of friendship breakdown
Personal control	Conduct and behaviour; influence on school life	Impact on relationships with others (adults/peers/friends)	Managing emotions
Hopes for group work participation	Positive future (job, school etc.) as a result of increased personal control	Increased problem solving skills (independent and / or as a group) and skills to get along	Independent management of emotions leading to higher quality relationships (adult/peer/friend)

Table 7: Developed thematic map for pre change interviews showing 3 main themes

Theme - Problematic aspects of friendships / peer relationships

The fractious nature of the friendships within the group was mentioned frequently and the consequences that this could result in, for example feeling excluded;

1.1: “When I fall out with my friends I feel left out. When we are friends I’m happy and feel like I’m not left out”.

Despite the desire to be friends, maintain friendships and be together as a group, there was a common feeling that the friendships were unstable;

7.3: “We are always falling out and I want to play with like all of us together”.

In addition, there were concerns around breaking confidences and being discussed when they were not present. This was raised as something that could impact on the group work;

3.4: “I don’t know when to believe her. She normally tells lies about things. Sometimes I don’t know when to believe her cos she always lies. I’m worried she will tell lies in the group. She’s a mate but she always tells lies”.

Theme - Personal control

The issue of how the participants were able to independently manage their own emotions was raised and the impact this had on relationships with family members and with friends;

8.1: “My attitude at home, me and me nana are always arguing and shouting at each other. Me and ... to be friends”

It appeared from these sorts of responses there was a motivation for participants to want to be able to manage their conduct towards others and they associated this with success in the classroom;

10.2: “I’m in classes with most of them so it would be helpful if I like passed the book over or something”.

The above two themes link to what they wanted from the group work as a result of the difficulties they were currently experiencing (as indicated by the arrow in Table 7, pg. 46):

Theme - Hopes for group work participation

It appeared that there was a strong motivation to ‘learn’, particularly in relation to how to resolve difficulties independently and get along with others;

2.1: “I want to know how to sort problems out myself”.

4.1: “I want to know how to get along”.

It seemed participants believed that by being equipped with such skills, particularly being able to problem solve independently, it would lead to better outcomes for their own future;

11.2: “I feel like I need to take part cos of everything that has gone on in the past and it’s gone on for ages so I feel like I should take part and see what happens and it might help me in the future”.

Post change data

Fifteen initial themes were generated at this stage of the analysis for the post change interviews and can be seen in the thematic map (Figure 6, pg.48).

Further consideration of the relationships between codes and themes at different levels led to the identification of 3 main themes; perceived improved outcomes, contributing factors of change and contributing factors of difficulty. Each of these themes comprised varying sub-themes (Table 8, pg.49).



³ Figure 6: Initial thematic map for post change data

Theme	Sub themes		
Perceived improved outcomes	Ability to solve problems independently or as a group	Application of learnt skills to a range of situations and relationships	Increased understanding of factors / behaviours leading to difficulty
Contributing factors of change	Strengthening bonds within the group	Development of skills e.g. problem solving through specific activities and discussion	Future directions regarding support and group work
Contributing factors of difficulty	Instability of friendships	Not taking personal responsibility for actions leading to problems	Other people's lack of understanding

Table 8: Developed thematic map for post change interviews showing 3 main themes

Theme - Perceived improved outcomes

This related to some extent to what participants had hoped for as a result of taking part in group work, particularly in terms of learning the skills to independently solve problems:

6.4: "Sometimes when I don't get along with people sometimes I don't know what to do but actually I do know what to do so I say sorry and it's alright – think before I speak really".

6.5: "If my friends are horrible, I know what to do. Cos we have learnt in the group you just ignore them and don't argue back".

Interestingly, the participants discussed how they applied the skills and understanding from the sessions to relationships and situations other than those related to friendships:

13.6: "Got better behaved in lessons – I was on report, was getting bad bad, one day all excellent. Got rewarded".

13.5: "Normally argue with me nana and fall out. Now I just go in my room instead of getting in a fight".

It seemed that participants had a greater understanding of causal factors relating to difficult situations and this resulted in approaches to overcome them:

13.9. "Getting along with people more, when we argue more I say sorry now, before I didn't say sorry and I let them come to me. Now I go to them more to say sorry. I can see when things are my fault".

2.3. "Normally argue with me nana and fall out. Now I just go in my room instead of getting in a fight".

Theme - Contributing factors of change

It appeared that spending time together as a group and having time to talk led to stronger bonds:

13.13 “Being in this group has helped us with our friendships and made us closer than we were before. Now we know if we fall out we know what to do and we know how to sort our problems out”.

7.12. “Being in the group – when we were on our own couldn’t tell each other, got more confident to tell them. Before we couldn’t tell them what we wanted to tell them cos we didn’t dare”.

Participants identified particular aspects of the group work that they found supportive and the skills developed as a result:

8.5. “When we had to write the poster, when we did the happy child and the angry child, what the angry child would be like, they smoked and loadsa different examples and then the happy child. Made me understand what it is like”

7.10 “People in the group speak the truth about you and you think in a way that is me. I have noticed how horrible I am sometimes to people. I sometimes don’t realise what I do sometimes
Q. good things about you? Now I am polite”.

Participants discussed aspects of the group work that they would have appreciated more input on and their opinions on what would be beneficial in future group work:

15.2. “Get the opinions of the people in the group, be truthful. Tell opinions of the people in the group. I say an opinion about... of each in the group (share views on each other)”.

15.9. Strength cards were good cos you can say what you think about each other in a nice way and show how you care. It’s one way of telling each other what you think and it’s like a game.

Theme - Contributing factors of difficulty

Participants were able to articulate particular problems they faced in terms of their friendships, similar to those described in the pre change interviews:

10.1. “I don’t really need ..., I or ... cos we just keep arguing and stuff keeps cropping up again”.

7.5. "The group work wasn't good when we all fell out because we just sat and weren't talking.

When we were friends we could talk and do stuff together instead of just like giving each other dirty looks".

It seemed that some participants were reluctant at times to take personal responsibility for their part in problematic situations or felt that others did not do this:

2.2 "Because when me and me nana argue we have big rows, then my mum joins in and I get blamed and at school my mates shout at me because I started it cos I may have said something I shouldn't of said".

1.3 "Not about the group, like when ... was walking out and then after the group she was joking about it".

Participants discussed what they perceived to be other people's lack of understanding in problematic situations in and out of the group work:

4.1 "I'm still friends with ..., not the ones in the group just I fell out with ..., just... always goes in a mood with me. Then she always wants to be back friends with me again. I don't see why I should forgive her all the time. But I've all me got all me friends out of the group anyways".

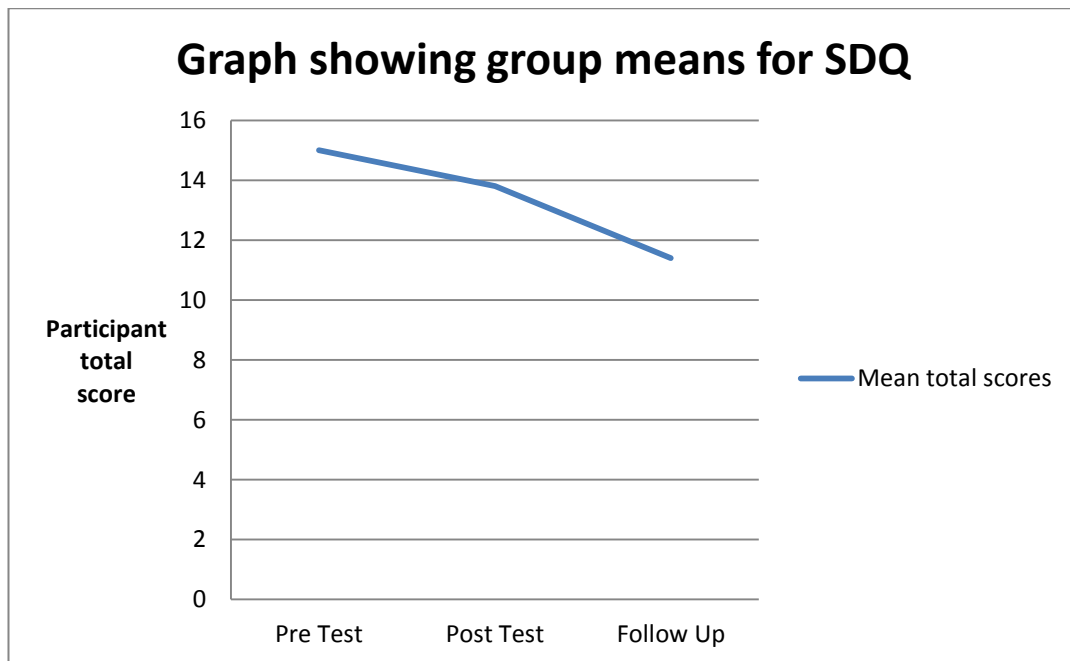
4.2. "It's been ok but when you fall out they always say stuff about you and walk out. Then like I get all the blame then wanna be friends again but I don't".

Follow up

A follow up interview , adapted from Elliot (1999) and Lynass et al (2011) (see Appendix I) was used with each of the participants in order to consider evidence of longer term change and whether the perceived benefits of the intervention had remained the same. In general, views towards the group work were that it contributed to a positive change in their lives and the effects reported in the post change interventions remained. Participants continued to utilise the skills they had learnt to resolve conflicts and maintain relationships. None of the participants reported any negative change as a result of taking part in the group work.

SDQ Data

Figure 7 (pg.52) shows the mean total scores for the group on the self report SDQ (Goodman, 1999).



⁴ Figure 7: SDQ mean participant total scores at pre, post and follow up

This shows that as a group, the total mean score decreased following the group work and at follow up six months after the group work. The overall participant total prior to the group work could be classed as 'Normal' and remained at 'Normal' at each stage. This provides some support for the need for early intervention although it is possible that as a group the overall scores could have decreased without it. This will be discussed further in the discussion section of this paper. One out of the five participants (Participant A) had an overall clinical score before the group work started and moved to a non clinical score after it and at follow up.

⁴ Scores on the SDQ can be classified as normal, borderline and abnormal. On the Total Difficulties Score, a score between 0-15 = Normal, 16-19 = Borderline and 20-40 = Abnormal.

Individual SDQ data

Participant	Biggest shift (Pre, post, follow up)
A	<i>Participant total:</i> Abnormal, Normal, Normal <i>Conduct:</i> Abnormal, Normal, Normal
B	<i>Conduct:</i> Abnormal, Abnormal, Normal
C	<i>Conduct:</i> Borderline, Normal, Normal <i>Impact Score:</i> Borderline, Abnormal, Abnormal
D	<i>Participant total:</i> Borderline, Borderline, Normal <i>Emotional:</i> Borderline, Borderline, Normal
E	<i>Prosocial behaviour:</i> Abnormal, Normal, Normal <i>Impact Score:</i> Abnormal, Abnormal, Normal

Table 9: Individual SDQ data showing greatest shift

Table 9 shows where there were the greatest changes on specific elements of the SDQ for each participant. For three of the participants this included the conduct measure. This was one of the themes that came out of the thematic analysis for the pre and post change interviews. For two of the participants this included the total SDQ score and for two it included the impact score. For one of the participants the impact score dropped from borderline to abnormal. Only one of the participants had a greatest shift on the emotional element. The full SDQ data for each participant is in Appendix O.

Discussion

Findings

The first research question was: ‘*would group work be helpful to a group of Year 7 girls?*’. Specific areas were highlighted as being beneficial from the data, particularly group problem solving skill and independent problem solving skill. Cassidy (2009) suggested that consideration could be made of how to use a problem solving intervention at a group level in order to develop interpersonal problem solving ability. In this study it was developed by problem solving as a group, through specific activities. These included games such as the ‘anger solutions game’ (Childswork / Childsplay, 2006) and using the ‘my problem’ worksheet (Stallard, 2002). In addition, solution focused questioning was used throughout the sessions. The results indicated that participants were also using their understanding in situations other than those related to friendship, for

example in the classroom and when in conflict with family members. This is a similar finding to that in Hall's (2006) study where students gained knowledge in responses to bullying behaviour but also applied it to the school environment. This was also seen in the SDQ changes for the 'Conduct' measure, which was the greatest change for three of the participants. This is interesting given that the focus of the group work was not specifically related to conduct, although the sessions were planned along with the views of what they wanted them to contain. This may have been due to completing specific activities and discussion to manage situations. In addition, results from the thematic analysis indicated that they were applying skills to other situations.

In terms of the family, Cassidy (2009) suggested that some children, particularly girls who have been bullied tend to keep it to themselves and not share their difficulties. In this instance it may have been the case that the girls were starting to get used to talking in a group about their problems and as a result were being more open with their families. Indeed, some of the participants reported in the post change interviews that they were communicating and sharing with their families in a much more positive manner.

The findings also provide support for the rationale to intervene with friendship difficulties as this was what the participants wanted and only took part if they agreed it would be beneficial to them. In that sense the group work provided a number of purposes. This included giving the participants a voice, in line with the legislation outlined in the introduction of this paper. It also fitted with a client centred approach (Rogers, 1957) in that people have an inherent drive to achieve their potential. In this study it appeared that the participants were motivated to take part as their friendships were of high importance to them and some of them associated this with success in the future.

The second research question considered whether data could be captured on relationships within that group. This was gathered through the use of the change interviews which generated an overarching theme relating to the problematic aspects of friendships and peer relationships, for example frequent falling outs. This provides some support to the suggestion that the establishment process for girls within the peer group is particularly problematic

(Besag, 2006). Benenson & Christakos (2003) found that girls tend to be more distressed than boys if a friendship was to end. One of the outcomes for the 'focus member' of the group was that she had accepted that at times it is better to leave a friendship if it is causing unnecessary levels of distress. This indicated that this distress amongst girls can potentially be alleviated with the right support to recognise when to abandon a potentially damaging friendship.

The third research question related to what was valued as important in friendships and what would support them when faced with difficulty. The notion of feeling included and being part of a group was common, in line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is possible that having opportunities to discuss commonalities, for example the 'circle of people' (based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model) led to a shared understanding of each other and thus strengthening the identity of the group. Rogers (1951) suggested that as a member of a group, the person learns what it means to give and to receive emotional support and understanding in a mature fashion. During the discussions the researcher facilitated with the participants developing their skills of empathy towards each other. Rogers (1951) also suggested that it may be easier for people to talk in a group situation than to a therapist individually. It is possible that this led to the participants feeling included, supported and listened to as part of a group. The theme of 'social exclusion' did not appear in the follow up interviews, providing some support for the model (figure 4, pg.38) proposed earlier.

As discussed the participants were active participants in leading the sessions and maintaining their discussions. In addition they played some part in planning the sessions, in line with the final research question: '*how could they be involved in planning their group work?*' This was supported in a number of ways. First of all, prior to the group work commencing participants were interviewed and this included opportunities to share ideas around the types of activities and discussion they would find helpful. One of the themes that came out of this was 'problem solving' as mentioned earlier. The sessions also preserved time at the end to allow for discussion about the subsequent session. The subsequent sessions were then planned with this feedback in mind and ideas presented at the next session. Participants were then given the

opportunity to discuss if they wanted to go ahead with these or try something different. This approach warrants consideration and will be discussed further.

Implications for EP practice

This study has some implications within the TaMHS (DFE, DFES) framework since it provides some support for early intervention, particularly at the small group level. One of the findings from an evaluation of TaMHS (2011) was that “schools indicated a high level of educational psychology input and other school based resources for troubled pupils rather than direct referral to specialist CaMHS”. However, another finding was that primary and secondary schools did not use approaches with a vigorous protocol or that were internationally tested.

An implication from this study is that it provides a model in which to intervene at a group level to contribute to psychological wellbeing, for example how to problem solve and how include pupil views in using the approach. In a review by Oliver et al (2008), mental health interventions tended to prioritise targets not suggested by the young people and did not make use of their views. In this study, although the initial focus was on ‘friendship’ this was broadened to include other issues that were pertinent to the girls and as mentioned earlier, they applied their understanding to a wider context following the sessions. A possible package for support for use by school staff and by EPs could be developed on the basis of this study. In a study by Hanley (2009) it was found that a successful therapeutic relationship lead to service users being enthusiastic to provide feedback to help improve the service. Involvement of participants in offering suggestions for development is worth considering.

Implications for future research

The implications can be considered firstly in terms of the methodological approach. Here, a case study approach was utilised to provide sufficient evidence to support the researcher’s interpretations (Willig, 2008). Since the participants reported benefits of the intervention and at follow up, the case study approach for evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions might be worth developing. This could be in the form of a longitudinal study to evaluate the impact of this type of early intervention on bullying amongst girls. Follow up on the participants to evaluate whether effects are long lasting is beneficial.

Consideration as to collecting data as the intervention took place, for example asking participants to keep a simple diary to collect feelings (Squires, 2002) or to complete homework assignments (Hall, 2006) could also be made.

Secondly, it is worth considering research into girls' friendships and what might be beneficial at a wider school level. Burton (2004) suggests that the ethos of the school and the commitment of staff to support group work are of high importance in terms of the effectiveness of the group work. An area for future consideration may therefore relate to how staff can be supported to support girls with their friendships and what systems are beneficial for this.

Limitations of the present study

This study has a number of limitations and these could have implications for future research. As it was carried out by a lone researcher it meant that the thematic analysis was not as rigorous. Unfortunately the SDQ data was incomplete and this meant the data is only from the participant's perspective and thus we cannot be certain that the changes they feel have taken place are in line with what others see. The use of the SDQ in itself has limitations. It could be argued that the results only show a minor decrease in the overall participant total. This is possibly due to the sample size. It was also hoped that by having support staff present this would lead to an increase in their own level of skill. However, the effects on the staff were not explored due to the time constraints placed upon them. In future research it would be beneficial to look at this in more depth.

Another issue lies in whether the results can be generalised as it was carried out with one group of girls in one school. It has been debated whether case study research lends itself to generalisation (Willig, 2007). This case study could be described as 'instrumental' since the purpose was to explore how a phenomenon (benefits of an intervention on friendship) could be analysed. In this study, the results have been able to provide some support for particular theories related to friendship. However, as pointed out by Willig (2007) this type of study cannot constitute a representative sample in the same way that a survey or questionnaire on a large scale would. It is therefore difficult to say whether the approach to group work used would therefore be beneficial to all girls although it could potentially be.

A further limitation concerns the dual role of the researcher in the study. As mentioned, the researcher was the EP for the school. It may be that staff had similar expectations to the usual generic work that was completed in the school. The staff perhaps valued the use of an intervention being completed by their EP since they had expressed their concerns for the participants that took part. However, they may not have valued the research component of the piece of work. In a study by Ashton & Roberts (2006) it was found that SENCOs valued the more traditional roles of the EP such as assessment and advice giving rather than aspects such as research and development. This could account for some of the data not being completed by staff. If the research had been completed in a different school then the views and value placed on it may have been different.

Conclusion

This study provides a rationale for utilising client centred skills in group work and the benefits went beyond the initial focus on friendship. This was achieved through an intervention completed over a six week period using a pre, post and follow up design utilising a case study approach. The use of thematic analysis led to three main themes in the pre and post data sets. This provided an insight into the relationships within the group and what they found supportive. Although the study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research, it provides a basis on which to build when working at the group level. This has implications for school staff and for EP practice.

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Appendix

**Appendix A: EPPI Centre Weight of Evidence (WoE)
tool, worked example – Cassidy (2007)**

<p>N.1 Are there ethical concerns about the way the study was done? <i>Consider consent, funding, privacy, etc.</i></p>	<p>N.1.2 No – Parental and pupil consent gained. Q’aires anonymous.</p>
<p>N.2 Were students and/or parents appropriately involved in the design or conduct of the study? <i>Consider your answer to the appropriate question in module B.1</i></p>	<p>N.2.1 Yes, a lot (please specify) N.2.2 Yes, a little (please specify) N.2.3 No (please specify)</p>
<p>N.3 Is there sufficient justification for why the study was done the way it was? <i>Consider answers to questions B1, B2, B3, B4</i></p>	<p>N.3.1 Yes – rationale for each of the measures given</p>
<p>N.4 Was the choice of research design appropriate for addressing the research question(s) posed?</p>	<p>N.4.1 yes, completely (please specify)</p>
<p>N.5 Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data collection methods or tools? <i>Consider your answers to previous questions:</i> <i>Do the authors describe any ways they have addressed the reliability or repeatability of their data collection tools and methods (K7)</i></p>	<p>N.5.1 Yes, good – reliability of measures discussed</p>
<p>N.6 Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data collection tools and methods? <i>Consider your answers to previous questions:</i> <i>Do the authors describe any ways they have addressed the validity or trustworthiness of their data collection</i></p>	<p>N.6.1 Yes, good (please specify)</p>

<p><i>tools/ methods (K6)</i></p>	
<p>N.7 Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data analysis? <i>Consider your answer to the previous question:</i></p> <p><i>Do the authors describe any ways they have addressed the repeatability or reliability of data analysis? (L7)</i></p>	<p>N.7.2 No (please specify)</p>
<p>N.8 Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data analysis? <i>Consider your answer to the previous question:</i></p> <p><i>Do the authors describe any ways they have addressed the validity or trustworthiness of data analysis? (L8, L9, L10, L11)</i></p>	<p>N.8.3 No, none (please specify)</p>
<p>N.9 To what extent are the research design and methods employed able to rule out any other sources of error/bias which would lead to alternative explanations for the findings of the study? <i>e.g. (1) In an evaluation, was the process by which participants were allocated to, or otherwise received the factor being evaluated, concealed and not predictable in advance? If not, were sufficient substitute procedures employed with adequate rigour to rule out any alternative explanations of the findings which arise as a result?</i></p> <p><i>e.g. (2) Was the attrition rate low and, if applicable, similar between different groups?</i></p>	<p>N.9.1 A lot (please specify) N.9.2 A little (please specify) N.9.3 Not at all (please specify)</p>
<p>N.10 How generalisable are the study results?</p>	<p>N.10.1 Details</p>
<p>N.11 In light of the above, do the reviewers differ from the authors over the findings or conclusions of the study?</p>	<p>N.11.1 Not applicable (no difference in conclusions) N.11.2 Yes (please specify)</p>

<i>Please state what any difference is.</i>	
N.12 Have sufficient attempts been made to justify the conclusions drawn from the findings, so that the conclusions are trustworthy?	N.12.1 Not applicable (results and conclusions inseparable) N.12.2 High trustworthiness N.12.3 Medium trustworthiness N.12.4 Low trustworthiness
<p>N.13 Weight of evidence A: Taking account of all quality assessment issues, can the study findings be trusted in answering the study question(s)?</p> <p><i>In some studies it is difficult to distinguish between the findings of the study and the conclusions. In those cases, please code the trustworthiness of these combined results/conclusions.</i></p>	N.13.1 High trustworthiness N.13.2 Medium trustworthiness N.13.3 Low trustworthiness
<p>N.14 Weight of evidence B: Appropriateness of research design and analysis for addressing the question, or sub-questions, of this specific systematic review.</p>	N.14.1 High N.14.2 Medium N.14.3 Low
<p>N.15 Weight of evidence C: Relevance of particular focus of the study (including conceptual focus, context, sample and measures) for addressing the question of this specific systematic review</p>	N.15.1 High N.15.2 Medium N.15.3 Low
<p>N.16 Weight of evidence D: Overall weight of evidence <i>Taking into account quality of execution, appropriateness of design and relevance of focus, what is the overall weight of evidence this study provides to answer the question of this specific systematic review?</i></p>	N.16.1 High N.16.2 Medium N.16.3 Low

Appendix B: Participant selection procedure

The following steps were followed to select participants for the research:

1. The research was discussed with the head of year 7 and pastoral support staff at the selected school with the researcher;
2. Staff discussed in the meeting a pupil they thought would benefit from a group work approach; based on their knowledge of the pupil and experience of her seeking support when having difficulty with her small group of friends;
3. Based on their knowledge of who the target participant was friends with the staff agreed in the meeting which other participants could form the group;
4. Following the meeting, staff spoke to each of the participants individually to ask them if they would like to take part in the research;
5. Once the participants had agreed to taking part the researcher met with each participant to provide further information and consent forms;
6. Participants then returned consent forms if they decided to take part.

Appendix C: Information sheets for participants

Dear

My name is Melanie and I'm studying how group work can support girls and their friendships. That is why I designed some group work sessions for Year 7 girls to take part in.



- **You are being asked to** come and meet me before we start our group work so you can fill in some questionnaires about the things you find easy and the things you find hard.



- We will have 6 group sessions to focus on problem solving skills and opportunities for discussion and to take part in different activities. After all the sessions I will meet with you again to complete another questionnaire and ask your views about the group and whether it was helpful.

Thank you very much!

Melanie melanie.sehgal@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervised by: Dr. Sue Pattison susan.pattison@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix D: Participant consent form

Dear Participant,

I'd like to introduce you to my project which I'm doing from Newcastle University. This project involves taking part in a group work intervention to develop problem solving skills to help with friendship. The sessions will involve activities to support each other as part of a group and will be run every week for an hour for 6 weeks.

I would like to ask for your consent to take part in this research and for you to sign this letter to provide me with your permission under the conditions (i.e., withdrawal and anonymity) as highlighted below.

I would like to inform you that you may withdraw from this research at any time and anything you tell me or provide me with will remain anonymous in any reports or documents I write concerning your participation.

All very best wishes,

Melanie Sehgal (Trainee Educational Psychologist).

Name.....
.....

Form

Group.....
.....

I do / do not (please delete as appropriate) wish to take part in the study outlined above

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix E: Parental consent form

Dear Parent / Guardian

I'd like to introduce you to my project which I'm doing from Newcastle University. This project will involve your daughter taking part in a group to develop problem solving skills to help with friendship. It is hoped that this will support group members to develop the skills they need to cope with such issues should they arise in the future and provide a supportive environment in which to do this. The sessions will involve activities to support each other as part of a group and will be run every week for an hour for 6 weeks. As part of my work in the University I will be writing a report that evaluates this work.

I would like to ask for your consent for your daughter to take part in this research and for you to sign this letter to provide me with your permission under the conditions (i.e., withdrawal and anonymity) as highlighted below. I would also be grateful if you would complete the short questionnaire attached.

I would like to inform you that your daughter may withdraw from this research at any time and anything she tells me will remain confidential. Her identity will not be revealed in any reports or documents. Any information that will be stored electronically will be anonymised.

A member of staff from school will be with the group during all the sessions and will be available should your daughter wish to discuss any of the matters arising from the sessions.

If you have any questions or would like any further information please do contact me by email or phone (contact details below).

All very best wishes,

Melanie Sehgal (Trainee Educational Psychologist).

Melanie.sehgal@newcastle.ac.uk

[Tel:01429_287363](tel:01429_287363)

Name.....

Form
Group.....

Signed.....
Date.....

I do / do not (please delete as appropriate) want my daughter to take part in the study outline above

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix F: Staff Consent form

Dear...

I'd like to introduce you to my project which I'm doing from Newcastle University. This project will involve you supporting me to develop problem solving skills to help with friendship for some Year 7 girls. It is hoped that this will support group members to develop the skills they need to cope with such issues should they arise in the future and provide a supportive environment in which to do this. The sessions will involve activities to support each other as part of a group and will be run every week for an hour for 6 weeks. As part of my work in the University I will be writing a report that evaluates this work.

I would like to ask for your consent for you to take part in this research and for you to sign this letter to provide me with your permission under the conditions (i.e., withdrawal and anonymity) as highlighted below.

I would like to inform you that you may withdraw from this research at any time. Any information you provide me about the participants and the group work will be anonymised. I would also appreciate your weekly feedback on your thoughts on the group through the use of some reflection sheets that I will provide you with. Your name will not be used in any write ups of this research.

If you have any questions or would like any further information please do contact me by email or phone (contact details below).

All very best wishes,

Melanie Sehgal (Trainee Educational Psychologist).

Melanie.sehgal@newcastle.ac.uk Tel:01429 287363

Name.....
Signed.....
Date.....
I do / do not (please delete as appropriate) want to take part in the study outline above

Appendix G: Client Change Interview Protocol (Pre measure)

Effectiveness of Group work:

Client Change Interview Schedule

(Young Person's Version- adapted by Melanie Sehgal 20.05.11)

Before we start the group work, group members are asked to come in for an interview. The major topics of this interview are any changes that you would like to see as a result of being in the group, what you believe may bring about these changes, and what might be helpful and unhelpful aspects of the group work. The main purpose of this interview is to allow you to tell me about the group work in your own words. This information will help me to understand better how the group work works; it will also help me to plan the group work. This interview is recorded for later transcription. Please provide as much detail as possible.

1. General Questions:

1a. How do you feel at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unhappy				Ok					Very Happy

1b. Why did you choose that number?

1c. How do you feel about your friendships at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unhappy				Ok					Very Happy

1d. Why did you choose that number?

2. Changes:

2a. What changes, if any, have would you like to see as a result of being part of the group? (in school, friendships, at home, in general, how you feel about yourself)

2b. Can you tell me something about why these changes might be significant in your life?

3. Helpful Aspects: Can you sum up what might be helpful about being in the group. Please give examples. (For example, types of activity / discussion to have)

4. Problematic Aspects: Anything that might be a problem in the group

5. The Research: How do you feel about taking part in this research?

6. Suggestions: [about 5 min] Do you have any suggestions for me, regarding the research or the group work? Do you have anything else that you want to tell me? Is there anything that I should have asked in this interview that I have left out?

Thank you for your time

Appendix H: Client Change Interview Protocol (Post measure)

Effectiveness of Group work:

Client Change Interview Schedule

(Young Person's Version- adapted by Melanie Sehgal 20.05.11)

After the group work is complete, group members are asked to come in for an hour-long interview. The major topics of this interview are any changes you have noticed since group work began, what you believe may have brought about these changes, and helpful and unhelpful aspects of the group work. The main purpose of this interview is to allow you to tell me about the group work in your own words. This information will help me to understand better how the group work works; it will also help me to improve the group work. This interview is recorded for later transcription. Please provide as much detail as possible.

1. General Questions:

1a. How are you doing now in general?

1b. What has the group work been like for you so far? How has it felt to be in the group?

2. Changes:

2a. What changes, if any, have you noticed in yourself since the group work started? *(Interviewer: Reflect back change to client and write down brief versions of the changes for later. If it is helpful, you can use some of these follow-up questions: For example, are you doing, feeling, or thinking differently from the way you did before? What specific ideas, if any, have you gotten from therapy so far, including ideas about yourself or other people? Have any changes been brought to your attention by other people?)*

2b. Has anything changed for the worse for you since the group work started?

2c. Is there anything that you wanted to change that hasn't since the group work started?

3. Change Ratings: *(Rate significance of each change on the following scale:)*

3a. How important or significant to you personally do you think that these changes have been? (Use this rating scale:)

(1) Slightly important

(2) Pretty important

(3) Very important

(4) Extremely important

(5) Maximum possible important

3b. Can you tell me something about why these changes have been significant in your life?

4. Attributions: In general, what do you think has caused the various changes you described? In other words, what do you think might have brought them about? (Including things both outside of group work and in group work). Are there things about yourself that you think have helped or have been unhelpful? Are there things in your life (family, job, relationships, living arrangements) that have helped or have been unhelpful?

5. Helpful Aspects: Can you sum up what has been helpful about your group work so far? Please give examples. (For example, general aspects, specific events)

6. Problematic Aspects:

6a. What kinds of things about the group have been unhelpful, negative or disappointing for you? (For example, general aspects, specific events)

6b. Were there things in the group work which were difficult or emotional but still OK or perhaps helpful? What were they?

6c. Has anything been missing from the group work? (What would make/have made your group work more effective or helpful?)

7. The Research: What has it been like to be involved in this research? (research interview, completing questionnaires etc.)

8. Suggestions: Do you have any suggestions for us, regarding the research or the group work? Do you have anything else that you want to tell me? Is there anything that I should have asked in this interview that I have left out?

Thank you for your time

Appendix I: Staff reflection sheet

Weekly reflection

Date:

How would you rate today's group work? (1= poor, 5 = ok, 10= excellent)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why did you choose that number?

Is there anything you would have liked more of?

Any other comments

Appendix J: Example of a therapeutic letter

Dear

Thank you for joining the group work sessions on friendship.



I hope that you found the sessions useful and gave you the chance to think about different ways to deal with problems to do with friendships. I wonder if you will continue to think about positive and negative consequences to different actions like you did when we did the problem solving grid?

I am glad that you found the activity on your ideal friend useful. I hope this will be useful in thinking about how you can be a good friend to others and what you see as important when you are looking to make friends.

I know that you enjoyed using the strength cards. I hope that this will remind you of all the qualities that you have and how these make you a good friend to others.

Keep up all your good work,

Best wishes,

Melanie Sehgal

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix K: Client change interview protocol (follow up measure)

Effectiveness of Group work: Client Change Interview Schedule

(Young Person's Version- adapted by Melanie Sehgal 13.01.12)

As a follow up, group members are asked to come in for an interview. The major topics of this interview are any changes you have noticed since group work began, what it has been like since, what you believe may have brought about these changes, and helpful and unhelpful aspects of the group work. The main purpose of this interview is to allow you to tell me about the group work in your own words. This information will help me to understand better how the group work works; it will also help us to improve the group work. This interview is recorded for later transcription. Please provide as much detail as possible.

1. General Questions:

1a. How do you feel at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unhappy				Ok					Very Happy

1b. Why did you choose that number?

1c. How do you feel about your friendships at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unhappy				Ok					Very Happy

1d. Why did you choose that number?

2. Changes:

2a. Thinking back to the group work you took part in last summer, was it helpful and have you noticed any changes in yourself since then?

(Interviewer: Reflect back change to client and write down brief versions of the changes for later. If it is helpful, you can use some of these follow-up questions: For example, are you doing, feeling, or thinking differently from the way you did before? What specific ideas, if any, did you get from the group work, including ideas about yourself or other people? Have any changes been brought to your attention by other people?)

2b. Did anything changed for the worse for you since the group work started?

2c. Is there anything that you wanted to change that didn't change?

3. Change Ratings: *(Rate significance of each change on the following scale:)*

3a. How important or significant to you personally do you think that these changes have been? (Use this rating scale:)

(1) Slightly important

(2) Pretty important

(3) Very important

(4) Extremely important

(5) Maximum possible important

3b. Can you tell me something about why these changes have been significant in your life?

4. Attributions: In general, what do you think has caused the various changes you described? In other words, what do you think might have brought them about? (Including things both outside of group work and in group work). Are there things about yourself that you think have helped or have been unhelpful? Are there things in your life (family, job, relationships, living arrangements) that have helped or have been unhelpful?

5. Helpful Aspects: Can you sum up what was helpful about your group work? Please give examples. (For example, general aspects, specific events)

6. Problematic Aspects:

6a. What kinds of things about the group were unhelpful, negative or disappointing for you? (For example, general aspects, specific events)

6b. Were there things in the group work which were difficult or emotional but still OK or perhaps helpful? What were they?

6c. Was anything missing from the group work? (What would make/have made your counselling more effective or helpful?)

7. The Research: What has it been like to be involved in this research? (research interview, completing questionnaires etc.)

8. Future support Is there any support in school or from elsewhere that you think might be helpful? If so, how do you think it would help and what changes might you see?

9. Suggestions: Do you have any suggestions for us, regarding the research or the group work? Do you have anything else that you want to tell me? Is there anything that I should have asked in this interview that I have left out?

Appendix L: Manual used for group work

- The group work integrated client centred skills and values into a more directive approach where specific activities were utilised in the sessions. These can be seen in the weekly plans included here.

Session 1 – Friday 10th June 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
9.10 – 10.10	MS	Introductions: 1) Who we are. Group members to give one word to describe how they felt when they walked in the room. 2) Reminder of the purpose of this group and the research.	Stickers	To get to know each other's names. To find out a little about each other.
10.10 – 10.30	MS	Ground Rules Come up with a set of ground rules for the group together.	Paper and pens	To ensure the smooth running of the group.
10.30 – 10.50	MS	'Circle of People' (Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. As a group we will think about the different people who are important in our lives.	Circles and pens	To prompt discussion about the people who support us in our lives. In addition, how being part of this group might offer additional support and reassurance. We will think about how this might change as you get older.
10.50 – 11.10	MS	Round up of today's session and what has been important. Discussion of pupils hopes for the group. Consider ideas for future sessions		Share ideas for activities / what might help.

Session 2 – Thursday 16th June 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
11.30 – 11.40	MS	Re- cap on last weeks session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of the group work • Ground rules • ‘Circle of people’ 		To remind group members the purpose of the intervention and what will support the smooth running of the sessions.
11.40 – 12.00	MS	‘Circle of People’ Discuss the diagram we did last week and consider the qualities we each have to enable us to have relationships with the different people in the circle. Use the strength cards to think about this.	‘Circle of people’ Strength cards	To consider the qualities we have that enable us to get along with the different people in our lives and why these are important. To support a sense of ‘group’ and ‘social’ identity’.
12.00 – 12.20	MS	Ideal friend Pupils to draw a picture (as a group) of their ideal friend and label it. Discuss whether they think they have any of these qualities and how they show them to their friends. Use strength cards for ideas	Paper and pens Strength cards	To consider what makes a good friend and how we can be good friends to others.
12.20 – 12.30	MS	Round up of today’s session and what has been important. Discussion of pupils hopes for the group. Consider ideas for future sessions		

Session 3 – Friday 24th June 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
10.10 – 10.20	MS	Re- cap on last weeks session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle of people • Ideal friend 	Ground rules Ideal friend sheet	To remind ourselves what we look for in a good friend, how we can be a good friend and what we would like to do more of.
10.20 – 10.35	MS	Strength cards (Incentive Plus, 2009) Each group member to select a card for themselves and explain why. Choose a card for the person sat next to them.	Strength cards	To consider the qualities we have that enable us to get along with the different people in our lives and why these are important. To support a sense of 'group' and 'social' identity'.
10.35 – 11.00	MS	'My problem' (Stallard, 2002) As a group consider a problem they may have / or have had in relation to friendships and think about the possible actions they could take. Then consider the positive / negative consequences as a result of these actions.	Paper and pens	To begin to think about how to problem solve independently and how the qualities we have can be used to deal with our problems
11.00 – 11.10	MS	Round up of today's session and what has been important.		

Session 4 – Friday 1st July 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
9.10 – 9.30	MS	Re- cap on last weeks session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My problem • Strength cards 	My problem work	To consider how using a problem solving approach might be useful in resolving conflicts
9.30 – 10.00	MS	‘Anger solutions game’ (Childsworld / Childsplay, 1996)	Board game	To help to understand that we have control over our responses in different situations and that we can make choices that result in positive solutions.
10.00 – 10.10	MS	Round up of today’s session and what has been important.		

Session 5 – Friday 8th July 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
10.10 – 10.30	MS	Re- cap on last weeks session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger solutions game • Friendship issues within the group 	My problem work	To consider how using a problem solving approach might be useful in resolving conflicts
10.30 – 11.00	MS	‘Anger solutions game’ (Childsworld / Childsplay, 1996)	Board game	To help to understand that we have control over our responses in different situations and that we can make choices that result in positive solutions.
11.00 – 11.10	MS	Round up of today’s session and what has been important.		

Session 6 – Friday 15th July 2011

Timing	Lead	Activity	Resources	Objective
9.10 – 9.20	MS	Re- cap on last weeks session and discuss how the week has been		
9.20 – 9.40	MS	Strength cards (Incentive Plus, 2009) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group member to select a card for themselves and explain why. • Choose a card for another person in the group. • Discuss how it feels to hear good things about yourself and others • Can you choose some cards that can help you out of a problem? 	Strength cards	<p>To consider the qualities we have that enable us to get along with the different people in our lives and why these are important.</p> <p>To support a sense of 'group' and 'social' identity'.</p>
9.40 – 9.50	MS	Social Skills Ball (Wellness Reproductions, 2005) Whoever catches the ball reads one of the statements and discusses it or acts it out. Ideas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name a favourite quality in a friend • Demonstrate 'bored' body language. 	Social Skills Ball	
9.50 – 10.10	MS	Round up of today's session and the last 6 weeks. Discuss what we have learnt and how this will be helpful in the future.		

Appendix M: Thematic analysis coding table (pre data)

Theme	Coded extract
<p>1. Social exclusion</p>	<p>1.1 “When I fall out with my friends I feel left out. When we are friends I’m happy and feel like I’m not left out”.</p> <p>1.2 “I’m happy at the moment because we are all friends”.</p> <p>1.3. “I don’t wanna fall out all the time I wanna stay friends and not talk about each other all the time cos it gets us in a tangle”</p>
<p>2. Problem solving</p>	<p>2.1. “I want to know how to sort problems out myself”.</p> <p>2.2 “I have wanted something like this before. Spending time to talk and sort things out. As a friendship group talk about what’s happening”.</p> <p>2.3 “I’ve asked to have this before to have a friendship group to make my friends get along more cos me and (Participant), (Participant) and (participant) all fell out and someone said summit about (participant) and we fell out if we come to this group you will help us and stuff”.</p> <p>2.4. “Be helpful to sort things out myself rather than rely on her to help me”.</p> <p>2.5. “Helps to be with people you don’t get along with now so you can sort things out”.</p>

3. Trust / betrayal / deceit

3.1 "When my friends are together and when I'm not there, they start talking about you".

3.2 "When I'm not there people talk about my secrets".

3.3 "Say like if I tell (participant) my biggest secret cos she is my best friend so I tell her everything. Cos I'm not there she would say to (participant) or (participant), I am like that, tell my secret so when I come back they might laugh or summit and I feel embarrassed cos you dunno what she has said about you. You dunno what anyone has said about you. You dunno what anyone has said".

3.4. "I don't know when to believe her. (Participant) normally lies about things. Sometimes I don't know when to believe her cos she always lies. I'm worried she will tell lies in the group. She's a mate but she always tells lies".

4. Learning how to get along

4.1 "I want to know how to get along".

4.2 "Do what we all like, get along – activities around how to get along".

4.3. " I wanna get on with her and the others as well. I wanna know how to get on with people. Not be best friends with them but just to get along with them".

4.4 "We are always falling out and I want to play with like all of us together".

4.5 "We all stay together and not fall out and be good in lessons".

4.6. "Then I'd get along with people more easier and if I didn't go to this group I might just stay the same and I wouldn't get along with people".

4.7." If we get along, then I might start getting along with them more cos we are in the group together".

<p>5. Continually confiding / investing in friends despite difficulties (lack of trust, getting along etc.)</p>	<p>5.1 “Cos (participant) is my best friends so if I tell her something, cos I’m not there she thinks she can say it to (participant and Participant). So when I come back to school it’s embarrassing. After this time I was scared to come back cos (participant) is my best friends and I tell her everything”.</p> <p>5.2 “My other friends that I’m with now don’t have the same trouble as me. They just say like keep out of it and don’t hang about with them but I haven’t really listened. Me families always said keep away from them but like I didn’t listen to them at the time. Them people were like me best friends”.</p>
<p>6. Best friends</p>	<p>6.1 “(participant) is (participant’s) best friend and (participant) is mine and when I’m with her (participant) is not there. (participant) nearly always says I’m her best friend but when (participant) comes back she’s like hers again. People keep changing best friends”.</p>
<p>7. In and out of friendships</p>	<p>7.1 “Cos at school we get fall outs, some days we are friends and then some people use me for some things fall out, then we get mates the next week and then we fall out again the next week”.</p> <p>7.2 “We are all friends but always falling out”.</p> <p>7.3 “We are always falling out and I want to play with like all of us together”.</p> <p>7.4. “Sometimes I feel alright, when friendships start breaking up I don’t feel happy”.</p>
<p>8. Relationships (friends / family)</p>	<p>8.1 “My attitude at home, me and me nana are always arguing and shouting at each other. Me and (participant) to be friends. Know how to get on with others”</p> <p>8.2 “Cos me and me nana fall out, it could cause anything really”.</p> <p>8.3. “In school, for like in me lessons I’d like to sit not next to them people. I don’t want to be horrible or anything and just not like get involved”.</p> <p>8.4 “Because I’ve chosen a different friendship group and now I feel a lot happier with them so that’s why I chose number 8”.</p>

8. Relationships (friends / family) continued

8.5 "Like I say I've chose a different friendship group, but Before I would of rated it like a lot less, but now I'm a lot happier I'm with me new friends than the friends I used to be with".

8.6. "It's cos I'm with me other friends from primary school and some that aren't but mostly from primary school and then J... says sorry to me and then I go back and it's all thingy again, I dunno. I don't want to be enemies, I don't wanna hate her or anything".

8.7. "Cos me friendships can be alright, sometimes I can't so".

8.8. "Friendships and at home. Mum doesn't really help me much, says there's nowt I can do. If I'm angry with someone she says there's nowt⁵ I can do about it. She doesn't do anything about it. Friendships to be more stronger".

8.9 "Then I'd get along with people more easier and if I didn't go to this group I might just stay the same and I wouldn't get along with people".

9. Emotions

9.1 "When I lose my temper and shouting I go over the top and come out with things".

9.2. "Help me control me anger".

9.3 "Sometimes I feel alright, when friendships start breaking up I don't feel happy".

9.4. "Then I'd get along with people more easier and if I didn't go to this group I might just stay the same and I wouldn't get along with people".

10. Personal conduct and behaviour

10.1 "When I get older I'll need a good job so I don't really wanna carry on in lessons so that's why I thought to ask can I can move away from them, so then it will be easier".

10.2. "I'm in classes with most of them so it would be helpful if I like passed the book over or something".

⁵ Nowt = nothing

<p>10. Personal conduct and behaviour (continued)</p>	<p>10.3 "I like to learn and get on with the teachers".</p> <p>10.4 "We all stay together and not fall out and be good in lessons".</p>
<p>11. Impact on the future (career etc.)</p>	<p>11.1 "When I get older I'll need a good job so I don't really wanna carry on in lessons so that's why I thought to ask can I can move away from them, so then it will be easier".</p> <p>11.2. "I feel like I need to take part cos of everything that has gone on in the past and its gone on for ages so I feel like I should take part and see what happens and it might help me in the future".</p> <p>11.3 "If we don't do well in lessons then we might not get a very good job".</p> <p>11.4. "It would probably change me a bit, in a good way".</p>

Appendix N: Thematic analysis coding table (post data)

Theme	Coded extract
<p>1. Conduct / behaviour</p>	<p>1.1. "At home sometimes I'm bit worried if attitude come out over the silliest little thing but that's about it". 1.2. "Me behaviour at school and at home (not changed but wanted to)". 1.3. "Not about the group, like when IY was walking out and then after the group she was joking about it". 1.4 "Got better behaved in lessons – I was on report, was getting bad bad, one day all excellent. Got rewarded". 1.5. My behaviour has changed much more so I know what to do when I'm angry so it's like when I wasn't in the group I would squeeze a pen to get anger out. 1.6. It's helped with behaviour at home, friendships, classroom behaviour – not getting disturbed – know what's going on in the classroom. I used to get disturbed straight away.</p>
<p>2. Relationships</p>	<p>2.1 Just a little bit, me and me brother still have our moments and stuff. Me and me nana still have our moments.</p> <p>2.2 Because when me and me nana argue we have big rows, then my mum joins in and I get blamed and at school my mates shout at me because I started it cos I may have said something I shouldn't of said.</p> <p>2.3. Normally argue with me nana and fall out. Now I just go in my room instead of getting in a fight.</p> <p>2.4. Getting along with people more, when we argue more I say sorry now, before I didn't say sorry and I let them come to me. Now I go to them more to say sorry. I can see when things are my fault</p> <p>2.5. If I argue with mum, I say sorry for how I have been. It's a lot easier to do that even if I haven't done anything. If my mum is stressed its best you say sorry.</p> <p>2.6. We could tell you what we wanted to tell someone for ages but didn't dare tell anyone. We could tell you because we knew you wouldn't tell anyone so we felt safe</p> <p>2.7. Home – I'm more confident. I tell my mum what I'm thinking – but less so because I'm friends with me friends. I don't need to talk to her about bullying or I've fallen out with IY. My mum understands me when I tell</p>

<p>2. Relationships (continued)</p>	<p>her. My mum is happier now. My mum likes IY – she sticks up for me. Mum points out that I shouldn't fall out with IY b because she was there when I got bullied and she was there for me. That's why I get upset when I fall out with her.</p> <p>2.8 The only people I tell stuff to is IY cos even when we fall out she never releases me secrets and me mam cos I love me mam and me grandma because I trust them. I would tell me dad but he works away so I never get time to tell him but me mam tells him.</p>
<p>3. Feelings about group work</p>	<p>3.1. Felt like it has helped me more. We still have fall out sometimes.</p> <p>3.2 Don't want to leave group it's quite fun.</p> <p>3.3. Been good, fun. I don't want to leave the group</p> <p>3.4. When I first heard about the group I was like 'oh my god!' When I come I had a feeling inside me, cos we were doing stuff together cos we had fell out by then. Once we had settled into the group after a few weeks we knew who you were.</p> <p>3.5. Lucky because we miss all the boring lessons and come to do a fun lesson.</p>
<p>4. Falling in and out with friends</p>	<p>4.1 I'm still friends with ..., not the ones in the group just I fell out with ..., just... always goes in a mood with me. Then she always wants to be back friends with me again. I don't see why I should forgive her all the time. But I've all me got all me friends out of the group anyways.</p> <p>4.2. It's been ok but when you fall out they always say stuff about you and walk out. Then like I get all the blame then wanna be friends again but I don't.</p>
<p>5. Blame</p>	<p>5.1 Because when me and me nana argue we have big rows, then my mum joins in and I get blamed and at school my mates shout at me because I started it cos I may have said something I shouldn't of said.</p>

5 Blame (continued)	5.2. It's been ok but when you fall out they always say stuff about you and walk out. Then like I get all the blame then wanna be friends again but I don't.
6. Problem solving strategies (independent application)	<p>6.1 At home I have these games. If me nana goes mental I play them. If paint my nails it helps. Cos I bite my nails and if I get angry it helps me, I dunno why.</p> <p>6.2 I open my window and get fresh air</p> <p>6.3. Now I just go in my room instead of getting in a fight.</p> <p>6.4. Sometimes when I don't get along with people sometimes I don't know what to do but actually I do know what to do so I say sorry and it's alright – think before I speak really.</p> <p>6.5. If my friends are horrible, I know what to do. Cos we have learnt in the group you just ignore them and don't argue back.</p>
7. Attributions of difficulties	<p>7.1. Since my ... died last Christmas – that's probably caused my problems like my attitude</p> <p>7.2. Got better behaved in lessons – I was on report, was getting bad bad, one day all excellent. Got rewarded</p> <p>7.3. Not about the group, like when IY was walking out and then after the group she was joking about it.</p> <p>7.4. No stress ball When people went in moods People being silly and not listening</p> <p>7.5. The group work wasn't good when we all fell out because we just sat and weren't talking. When we were friends we could talk and do stuff together instead of just like giving each other dirty looks.</p>
8. Supporting factors / elements	7.1 Anger game – ways of letting anger out, like squeezing your fists. I would use these ideas again.

8. Supporting factors / elements (continued)

7.2. When I walked out – an adult came with us. That helped

7.3. Since my ... died last Christmas – that's probably caused my problems like my attitude. It comes out now. It helps to talk about it.

8.5. When we had to write the poster, when we did the happy child and the angry child, what the angry child would be like, they smoked and loadsa different examples and then the happy child. Made me understand what it is like.

7.6. I think I'm used to it cos I live with me dad so this man comes to the house and talks to me about my life – not school but about home life. So it doesn't really bother me. About me mum, it is difficult but helpful to get it all out.

7.7. Strength cards.
Anger solutions game cos we could answer our questions, their questions.

7.8. Stress ball – squeeze rather than fling it.

7.9. Talking about home life

7.10 People in the group speak the truth about you and you think in a way that is me. I have noticed how horrible I am sometimes to people. I sometimes don't realise what I do sometimes
Q. good things about you? Now I am polite.

7.11 When I got blamed, actually helped to be told when in the wrong. Sometimes I realise that it is my fault when people fall out.

7.12. Being in the group – when we were on our own couldn't tell each other, got more confident to tell them. Before we couldn't tell them what we wanted to tell them cos we didn't dare.

7.13. That board game – I didn't dare tell you but I did. It was hard to say about me dad but I did. Tweety pie.

9. Group problem solving	<p>9.1. Since I've started the group I can handle things better. Because like when I didn't come to the group I always used to have to like handle it on my own. But now we can like sort it out together in the group.</p> <p>9.2. Now we know if we fall out we know what to do and we know how to sort our problems out.</p> <p>9.3. When we fall out with friends we know what to do now. If we are angry we know what to do. If we need to calm down we know what to do. It's helped me a lot</p>
10. Accepting not needing to be friends	<p>10.1. I don't really need ..., I or ... cos we just keep arguing and stuff keeps cropping up again.</p>
11. Changing friends	<p>11.1. I knew ... since primary school but I wasn't really hanging about with her at secondary that much it wasn't like I was hating her but I had ..., ... and then ever since ... came along it went bang and we all split up. ... and I went off and they were like best friends. Before we used to be like a big group of like best friends.</p>
12. Getting along	<p>12.1. And now we don't really like get along I just get along with one person in the group.</p> <p>12.2 Alright, get along with people all the time.</p> <p>12.3. Getting along with people more, when we argue more I say sorry now, before I didn't say sorry and I let them come to me. Now I go to them more to say sorry. I can see when things are my fault</p> <p>12.4. Sometimes when I don't get along with people sometimes I don't know what to do but actually I do know what to do so I say sorry and it's alright – think before I speak really.</p> <p>12.5. My friends say sorry so I thought maybe I should be saying sorry as well. Q. role models? Yes. When we all argue they say they shouldn't of acted that way. They say sorry after the group.</p> <p>12.6 Me and IY have made friends and cos me and IY are friends me and J are coming on better, me and A are a bit better, me and MJ ok</p>
13. Consequences of group participation	<p>13.1 If I didn't join the group I wouldn't really know how to handle things because then I'd just be arguing</p> <p>13.2. Just within school because like about friendships, that's just helped really.</p>

13. Consequences of group participation (continued)

- 13.3. My nana has (noticed change)
Made more friends, got closer to people in the group.
- 13.4. Helped me to express my anger
- 13.5. Normally argue with me nana and fall out. Now I just go in my room instead of getting in a fight.
- 13.6. Got better behaved in lessons – I was on report, was getting bad bad, one day all excellent. Got rewarded
- 13.7. Loads of people in the school and you have picked my group of friends. Made me feel important.
- 13.8. I get me emotions out more and how I feel about people, when I get it out I feel better so it helps afterwards. Need a breather sometimes
- 13.9. Getting along with people more, when we argue more I say sorry now, before I didn't say sorry and I let them come to me. Now I go to them more to say sorry. I can see when things are my fault
- 13.10 Sometimes when I don't get along with people sometimes I don't know what to do but actually I do know what to do so I say sorry and it's alright – think before I speak really.
- 13.11 Say if I got a job and I had friends in a job and if I didn't get along I might lose my job if I'm saying nasty things to them
- 13.12. I'm thinking about the future
- 13.13 Being in this group has helped us with our friendships and made us closer than we were before. Now we know if we fall out we know what to do and we know how to sort our problems out.
- 13.14. It has made our friendships much much better.

14. Deceit

- 14.1... has been slagging us off behind our backs.

15. What we need more of / be helpful to have in group work

15.1 Stress ball. Think I've seen them in the works.

When the person was talking, when she had People didn't use tweety properly. Should have used tweety more.

15.2. Get the opinions of the people in the group, be truthful

Tell opinions of the people in the group. I say an opinion about... of each in the group (share views on each other).

15.3. Do the strength cards. Play a different game. Stress balls.

15.4 Every bodies point of view of how people act. Get everyone's opinions. What to say instead of being nasty. Suggest stuff.

15.5. Ball I thought that was good

15.6. Say what think of each other

15.7. If they have a problem, talk about who they could talk to. Don't say nasty things, go to a teacher or a parent instead to tell them about the problem.

15.9. Strength cards were good cos you can say what you think about each other in a nice way and show how you care. It's one way of telling each other what you think and it's like a game.

15.10. Stress balls. Things to squeeze

15.11. I want to do it again. Play the board games. Do posters. Let them work together not separately. Bring tweety pie. Play ball game. Use a sensory room if they have one

Appendix O: Individual SDQ data

Participant A:

Score	Pre	Post	Follow up
Participant Total	21 - abnormal	10 - Normal	10 - Normal
Emotional	6 - Borderline	3 - Normal	1 - Normal
Conduct	4 - Abnormal	0 - Normal	3 - Normal
Hyperactivity	8 - Abnormal	6 - Borderline	6 - Borderline
Peer problems	3 - Normal	1 - Normal	0 - Normal
Prosocial behaviour	6 - Normal	10 - Normal	7 - Normal
Impact score	2 - Abnormal	0 - Normal	0 - Normal
Parent total	17 -Abnormal	20 - Abnormal	
Emotional	4 - Borderline	5 - Abnormal	
Conduct	5 - Abnormal	6 - Abnormal	
Hyperactivity	6 - Borderline	5 - Abnormal	
Peer problems	2 - Normal	4 - Abnormal	
Prosocial behaviour	5 - Borderline	5 - Borderline	
Impact score	4 - Abnormal	3 - Abnormal	
Teacher total		17 - Borderline	
Emotional		4 - Normal	
Conduct		4 - Abnormal	
Hyperactivity		6 - Borderline	
Peer problems		3 - Normal	
Prosocial behaviour		5 - Borderline	
Impact score		0 - Normal	

Participant B:

Score	Pre	Post	Follow up
Participant Total	13 - Normal	19 - Borderline	13 - Normal
Emotional	0 - Normal	2 - Normal	2 - Normal
Conduct	5 - Abnormal	6 - Abnormal	2 - Normal
Hyperactivity	7 - Abnormal	7 - Abnormal	7 - Abnormal
Peer problems	1 - Normal	4 - Borderline	2 - Normal
Prosocial behaviour	8 - Normal	6 - Normal	7 - Normal
Impact score	3 - Abnormal	8 - Normal	1 - Borderline
Parent total	25 - Abnormal	28 - Abnormal	
Emotional	8 - Abnormal	8 - Abnormal	
Conduct	6 - Abnormal	6 - Abnormal	
Hyperactivity	6 - Borderline	10 - Abnormal	
Peer problems	5 - Abnormal	4 Abnormal	
Prosocial behaviour	6 - Normal	1 - Abnormal	
Impact score	1 - Borderline	3 - abnormal	
Teacher total		22 - Abnormal	
Emotional		4 - Normal	
Conduct		9 - Abnormal	
Hyperactivity		5 - Normal	
Peer problems		4 - Borderline	
Prosocial behaviour		5 - Borderline	
Impact score		3 - abnormal	

Participant C:

Score	Pre	Post	Follow up
Participant Total	8 - Normal	10 - Normal	14 - Normal
Emotional	1 - Normal	0 - Normal	4 - Normal
Conduct	3 - Borderline	3 - Normal	3 - Normal
Hyperactivity	4 - Normal	3 - Normal	5 - Normal
Peer problems	0 - Normal	2 - Normal	2 - Normal
Prosocial behaviour	10 - Normal	9 - Normal	7 - Normal
Impact score	1 - Borderline	5 - Abnormal	2 - Abnormal
Parent total	12 - Normal		
Emotional	2 - Normal		
Conduct	3 - Normal		
Hyperactivity	4 - Normal		
Peer problems	3 - Borderline		
Prosocial behaviour	9 - Normal		
Impact score	0 - Normal		
Teacher total		18 - Abnormal	
Emotional		5 - Borderline	
Conduct		6 - Abnormal	
Hyperactivity		3 - Normal	
Peer problems		4 - Borderline	
Prosocial behaviour		6 - Normal	
Impact score		3 - Abnormal	

Participant D:

Score	Pre	Post	Follow up
Participant Total	19 - Borderline	18 - Borderline	15 - Normal
Emotional	6 - Borderline	6 - Borderline	3 - Normal
Conduct	6 - Abnormal	5 - Abnormal	5 - Abnormal
Hyperactivity	5 - Normal	6 - Borderline	5 - Normal
Peer problems	2 - Normal	3 - Normal	2 - Normal
Prosocial behaviour	9 - Normal	7 - Normal	7 - Normal
Impact score	3 - Abnormal	3 - Abnormal	2 - Abnormal
Parent total	27 - Abnormal		
Emotional	8 - Abnormal		
Conduct	7 - Abnormal		
Hyperactivity	8 - Abnormal		
Peer problems	4 - Abnormal		
Prosocial behaviour	5 - Borderline		
Impact score	5 - Abnormal		
Teacher total		9 - Normal	
Emotional		0 - Normal	
Conduct		3 - Borderline	
Hyperactivity		4 - Normal	
Peer problems		2 - Normal	
Prosocial behaviour		6 - Normal	
Impact score		0 - normal	

Participant E:

Score	Pre	Post	Follow up
Participant Total	14 - Normal	12 - Normal	5 - Normal
Emotional	4 - Normal	2 - Normal	0 - Normal
Conduct	3 - Normal	3 - Normal	2 - Normal
Hyperactivity	6 - Borderline	5 - Normal	2 1 Normal
Peer problems	1 - Normal	2 - Normal	1 - Normal
Prosocial behaviour	3 - Abnormal	7 - Normal	6 - Normal
Impact score	3 - Abnormal	3 - Abnormal	0 - Normal
Parent total	15 - Borderline		
Emotional	5 - Abnormal		
Conduct	5 - Abnormal		
Hyperactivity	3 - Normal		
Peer problems	2 - Normal		
Prosocial behaviour	2 - Normal		
Impact score	3 - Abnormal		
Teacher total		8 - Normal	
Emotional		1 - Normal	
Conduct		2 - Normal	
Hyperactivity		3 - Normal	
Peer problems		2 - Normal	
Prosocial behaviour		5 - Borderline	
Impact score		0 - Normal	