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# Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Policies in High Schools

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Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Policies in High Schools

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A project based upon an independent investigation,  
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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### Abstract

This study focused on the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools from the perspectives of college students. Literature suggests that anti-bullying policies are in place nationally in high schools but implementation of these policies have been questionable. Several studies have indicated a need for more enforcement of bullying prevention efforts in high schools. This quantitative study gathered data from surveys distributed to and completed by college freshmen students, almost all of whom have had a bullying experience at least once in high school. Findings imply that participants were split in their perspective of how effective and beneficial their high school's attempts were in implementing their anti-bullying policies. This study suggests that more research be done in order to closely and further investigate the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools.

## The Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Policies at the High School Level

This study will aim to discover the effectiveness of recent anti-bullying policies implemented at high schools in the United States. Before addressing the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies, it is essential to first be familiar with what constitutes bullying. Bullying has been defined in various ways whether it be by states, schools and even at the individual level; therefore there is significance in knowing the commonly accepted definition. Bullying in the school setting will typically be considered as an act of aggression demonstrated when one or more students choose to repeatedly inflict some form of harm upon another student who may be unable to defend him or herself (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). With this in mind, the bully would be characterized as the student who is imposing the harm on the other student.

Though there is one general definition for bullying that is commonly used, there are several types of bullies that this study will focus on. The type easiest to recognize is physical bullying. Many people may even believe that bullying behavior is only considered bullying if it gets to a physical level but bullying can also be verbal, relational and reactive. Past research discussed in the literature review will even discuss just how frequent non-violent bullying is in schools. Because there are multiple identifiable forms of bullies, it is understandable for schools to find difficulty in noticing the influence of policies and therefore the need to research the effectiveness is emphasized.

Exploring the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies would have much value considering the staggering statistics concerning bullying prevalence in schools. Approximately one in five children and adolescents are victims of bullying and one in three are involved as a bully, victim, or both (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). Another study conducted in 2001 used surveys to find that almost 30 percent of students in grades six through ten experienced occasional participation in

bullying, with 13 percent identifying themselves as the bully, about 17 percent to being the victim, and 6.3 percent of that 17 percent admitting to also being the bully (Harlow & Roberts, 2010). Given these statistics it is important to keep in mind that these numbers derive from the amount of students who actually chose to report their being a participant in bullying incidents. Several victims choose to not disclose their experiences of bullying, meaning that the number of bullying incidents would probably be much higher in reality. Bullying may be an even bigger and more relevant issue than it is already made out to be.

Social workers in the school setting are constantly dealing with student behaviors and will inevitably encounter bullying issues among students. It would be crucial for social workers and other helping professionals in the school setting to know whether or not the implementation of anti-bullying policies is achieving its purpose. Being in a position to have the opportunity to work so closely with students, social workers need to know if they are making the appropriate interventions in bringing about a healthier, safer school environment. In order to discover whether or not anti-bullying policies that are in place in high school systems are truly having a beneficial impact on the school and its students, this study will cover the frequency of bully reports by students, the students' perspectives on how their high schools addressed the issue and what they have done to prevent future bullying practice.

## **Literature Review**

### **Types of Bullying and Its Impact**

Bullies can also be sub-categorized into four different types. The first type of bully, which happens to be the most easily recognizable, is the physical bully. Physical bullies utilize a straightforward method in which they physically abuse their victims. Examples of this may be hitting and kicking other students. Clearly, physical bullies have issues of aggression and will

most likely exhibit such behavior throughout life. The second type of bully is the verbal bully, using hurtful words and language in order to humiliate students (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). What makes verbal bullying harder to recognize or report than physical bullying is the fact that it is delivered rapidly, with there being almost no time to identify that bullying is even taking place. Relational bullies, the third type, use social exclusion as an act of aggression against the victim (Woods & Wolke, 2003). Examples of this type of bullying is starting gossip and spreading rumors; basically, relational bullying is any indirect action which is intended to control or harm relationships (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). The manipulation involved in relational bullying will result in victims harboring feelings of rejection and loneliness, especially at a stage of development when establishing social connections and status is critical (Woods & Wolke, 2003) and will be prominently evident amongst girls. The final type of bully is the reactive bully who can be characterized as acting on impulse whilst teasing others to the extent where they fight back. Reactive bullies initiate and engage in the fighting but will then usually claim to have been defending themselves (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). It may come as a surprise that there are cases when certain types of bullies are also being victimized by peer bullies.

An additional type of bully that is often neglected in research is the bully-victim in which the bully is also a victim of bullying. Basically, bully-victims adapt the same qualities of bullies and victims as discussed earlier. What little literature can be found on the unique case of the bully-victim indicates that bully-victims learn confrontational behavior at home, directing them to apply it to the rest of the world as cruel and untrustworthy which may lead them to having low self-esteem, high neuroticism and serious deficits in problem solving abilities (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Bully-victims are often overlooked or neglected in intervention because they can easily be considered solely the bully or solely the victim. Because research has indicated that

bully-victims may be the highest at-risk group for long-term behavior and health problems. It would be helpful if more studies focused on this group to better address the whole school population (Woods and Wolke, 2003). The need to explore the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions is apparent, as there is not even enough research on possibly the most at-risk group for facing psychological development problems.

Though the bullies are the antagonists, bullying behavior is often associated with other problems faced by the bully. Lacking the ability to process social information and misinterpreting others' behaviors as being hostile are common examples of deficits bullies encounter. Bullies might mistakenly perceive hostility from another, and thus they will react aggressively. Bullies also lack the ability to problem-solve, leading them to externalize their issues as a coping mechanism (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Bullying may be a behavior manifested due to the home lifestyle adapted by the bully. For example, if the bully's guardian or caretaker tolerates aggressive behavior in the home, the student will deem it acceptable to bring that sort of behavior with him to school. In another instance, a bully may learn aggression through a caretaker's treatment of him. If parents physically punish their children, it will be instilled in them that violence is a successful tool in getting what they want (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Essentially, children will model after what their guardians do in achieving their motives. Furthermore, there seems to be a relationship between academic performance and bullying. Those who bully demonstrate poor educational achievement and possess a negative attitude in the school environment (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Poor academic performance can also be due to having a mental health disability which is very likely for bullies. In fact, nearly one-third of identified bullies have attention-deficit behavior, 12.5 percent have depression and another 12.5 percent have oppositional conduct disorder (Smokowski & Kopasz,

2005). What makes these facts so concerning is that underachievement in schools can add to lower potential and success found in employment settings for the future. This could mean that bullies may face harsher integration into the autonomous adult world. Being aware of the various issues bullies may be going through, it is crucial that intervention strategies are mindful that bullying behavior may be a result from a different problem that is beyond the bully's control. It would be important to consider the needs of the bully in addressing incidents of bullying and making sure that anti-bullying policies are truly having a positive impact.

### **Impact of Bullying on the Bully and the Victim**

The impact of bullying on the victim is considerably significant in all life aspects of the victim. To start, victims will potentially experience difficulty in social and emotional regulation which will inhibit them from developing relationships and breaking out of isolation (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). One contributing factor as to why bullying could lead to their inability to establish relationships is that they may possibly view themselves as failures. Harlow and Roberts (2010) conducted a study which explored the relationship between social and psychological factors and being bullied and found that as the frequency of victimization increases, the extent to which the victim feels he or she can succeed at things decreases. Seeing oneself as a failure can also include feelings and false beliefs that one is unattractive, unintelligent and insignificant compared to peers (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Victims of bullying, then, can become victims of feeling that they don't matter, resulting in major self-esteem issues. Victims' self-consciousness may result in being diagnosed with anxiety, depression and/or other internalizing disorders. Bullied victims can respond in even more severe ways through chronic absenteeism, reduced academic performance, increased apprehension, and even suicidal ideation (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Absenteeism may result from the fear of



suffering more bullying, which is very likely since bullying is a continuous action. Indeed, students will try to avoid any encounters with bullies at all costs, viewing school as an unsafe setting (Marlow & Roberts, 2010). In fact, Whitted and Dupper (2005) found that an estimated 160,000 students choose to stay home in replace of school every day in the United States due to the fear of being bullied. If students are choosing to avoid school, it can be assumed that not enough has been done in enforcing anti-bullying policies to really address the issue.

Lacking the assertiveness and courage to attempt defending themselves sufficiently, victims will often choose not to report any experiences of bullying, which then only allows the bullies to continue inflicting harm. This makes it that much more imperative for school psychologists and social workers to seek out victims since they are unwilling to disclose the issue at hand. Whether it be out of fear for bullying worsening or shame, victims may rather keep the incidences they encounter to themselves with the hope of sparing themselves of the possible humiliation that may come along with confessing. In addition, victims of bullying might receive less social support from parents, teachers and other critical role-players (Harlow & Roberts, 2010). According to previous research it seems as though victims are not receiving the interventions they need in order to prevent further damage to their social and emotional development as well as help reduce unsafe behavior in schools.

### **Reports of Bullying in Schools**

The number of bullying reports does not come close to matching the actual number of bullying incidents. With this in mind, it would be helpful to understand in depth why students choose to withhold such pertinent information. A qualitative study conducted by Mishna (2004) investigated experiences of victimization in the school setting from multiple perspectives. Asking students about their opinions regarding the option of reporting bullying incidents, there

were mixed reviews. Mishna (2004) found that some students would choose not to disclose the trauma to parents or teachers because they didn't want them to get the principal involved.

Another student was convinced that telling an adult would only make it worse; that the bully will in fact proceed to act aggressively for longer and perhaps even harsher than before just because of the fact that he/she told on him. Another study conducted by Oliver and Candappa (2007) sought to analyze the students' silence when it came to bullying and found that a lack of confidence in the adults' ability to help was very common. Students were doubtful that adults had any control in the situation, which might even be a shared thought held by the parent. One mother had reported that, though she was angry to know that her daughter was being mistreated, she did not want to make her daughter be in a possibly even more embarrassing situation by intervening, thus she had "bit her tongue" (Mishna, 2004). Earlier it was revealed that victims might be hesitant to tell adults out of the shame they might feel. The reluctance to confide in parents may derive from not wanting to worry parents; to some students it would be easier to keep it a secret so that way parents would not have to know the rejection their children experience at school (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). However, Mishna (2004) had interviewed other students who have had positive experiences with going forth and telling their teacher. One student's teacher had given out detentions or sent bullies to the office and the victim had noticed that the other students became friendlier as a result. The reviews of school intervention can be characterized as mixed, making it confusing as to whether or not anti-bullying policies are doing their job.

Oliver and Candappa (2007) had also discovered what exactly students would do to address the bullying themselves, especially if they chose not to tell an adult. One option was standing up for themselves. A majority of the participants in Oliver and Candappa's (2007)

focus group discussions felt that it was best to handle the bullying on their own rather than getting anyone else involved. In fact, 75% of students in the fifth grade and 61% of students in the eighth grade thought that confronting a bully would help them learn how to stand up for oneself and would eventually 'always' or 'usually' be successful in discontinuing the bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Unfortunately, the student belief that dealing with bullying independently is deemed a successful solution does not necessarily end up being true. Telling friends was also another response given by students experiencing bullying. Students believed that they felt supported by their friends and had felt that they had a greater sense of what they were going through. Unlike adults, friends had most likely witnessed bullying before in and outside of the school setting which would allow them to not question the victim's honesty about the bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Friends would never need convincing that the student is being bullied whereas teachers and parents might feel like they need some form of proof before accusing another student of bullying. Students' lack of trust towards school faculty members may suggest that policies are in need of tweaking to evoke a sense of reliance, promoting reportage of bullying.

For the students that did choose to disclose bullying information to their teachers, there was once again mixed reviews as to the teacher's ability to effectively address the issue. Telling teachers was associated with having the wider range of risks in response to bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Students found that teachers would break confidentiality in their attempt to intervene, declining any sense of trust the student may have towards the teacher. If anything, students felt as if there was a specific teacher that they knew would handle the situation in a way that was comfortable and agreeable to them, but students were very reluctant to simply tell any teacher (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). This suggests that the willingness of the victim to confide in

school faculty is strongly dependent on their relationship with that member. If the student feels as though the teacher would have the capacity to listen and understand, they would be more likely to allow them to step in and help. A study by Bauman, Rigby and Hoppa (2008) investigated the differences in teachers' and school counselors' strategies in addressing incidents of bullying. Out of the 58 percent of students studied who had reported being bullied multiple times a week and told a teacher about it, a mere 28 percent said that the teacher had been successful in putting an end to the bullying, whereas 30 percent said the teacher had attempted to intervene but the situation either did not change or became worse and 8 percent had even claimed that the teacher did not do anything in response to the information given by the student (Bauman, et. al., 2008). School counselors, on the other hand, seemed to have produced different perceptions in students. Counselors were reportedly more empathetic when confided in and also understood the seriousness of the incidents more than teachers, especially when it came to relational bullying (Bauman, et. al., 2008). It is not surprising that students would choose to go to counselors and that counselors should have more positive feedback than teachers because a majority of teachers had never had to receive any formal training on how to deal with bullying situations like counselors may have had to. In fact, 86 percent of the educators who completed the questionnaire distributed by Bauman, Rigby and Hoppa (2008) had said they did not have any anti-bullying training in their life and 42 percent of those teachers had worked in schools where an anti-bullying policy was non-existent. Teachers might not be able to effectively intervene because they do not know the proper and appropriate way to do so, meaning they lack the skills in dealing with behavioral problems among students. Perhaps anti-bullying policies should include mandatory training for teachers on how to handle bullying and thus be more effective.

## **The Emergence and Implementation of Anti-Bullying Practices**

Where did all the pressure to address bullying come from? It is interesting to discover when and exactly why anti-bullying campaigns have started to come to surface almost suddenly. It is especially curious because in the past, bullying had typically been thought of as a natural part of growing up. Historically, bullying was often equated with teasing and simply placed on the backburner, being dismissed as normal child behavior (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Many adults had even viewed the experience of bullying as a rite of passage for children and youth (Limber & Small, 2003), but now the bullying issue has magnified, becoming a major public concern among school personnel, members of the community, and policy makers. Past literature and news have indicated that the emergence of tragic incidents could have sparked the urgent need for bullying prevention. The laws that have gone into effect by states in the early 2000s were mainly motivated by the shootings that several U.S. high schools encountered in the late 1990s, raising awareness that the perpetrators of these shootings were usually those who had felt persecuted, bullied and threatened by their peers (Limber & Small, 2003). Walton (2010) has offered tragic bullying events that took place in British Columbia which have added on to the pressure of schools to take more of an active effort to create a safe and healthy environment for students. One account was of victim Dawn-Marie Wesley who, in the year 2000, hung herself after ongoing bullying and receiving death threats from her female peers (Walton, 2010). The other instances are just as tragic and though they are extreme and demonstrate more of the rare cases, it is still true that events as horrific as these had to happen for schools to finally begin implementing anti-bullying policies effectively.

A study conducted in England by Samara and Smith (2008) was aimed at discovering how schools address bullying and explored the transformation of school policies regarding

bullying over the last decade. It wasn't until the 1990's that school systems started to gain understanding of the seriousness of bullying and thus an increase in resources for schools to do something about it became available. In 1999 it became a legal requirement for schools to operate some form of an anti-bullying policy (Samara & Smith, 2008). It was during this time that schools felt greater pressure from the public and political spheres; it was also a time when there was much publicity on the need for carrying out measures that would help reduce bullying behaviors (Samara & Smith, 2008). It would have looked bad for a school not to take some kind of initiative on an issue that was of growing concern for the general public. Political pressure from journalists and parents compel administrators to enact policies, making it a source of social anxiety and policy regulation (Walton, 2010). Based on the increased focus on bullying, school systems had to develop a plan because it was no longer acceptable to not take responsibility for the bullying taking place on school grounds. As of about six years ago, the United States had eight states that considered or adopted legislation which required schools to implement bullying prevention policies or programs (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Massachusetts was the first of these states to implement by allocating \$1 million to "bully-proof" schools (Whitted & Dupper, 2005) and since around this time, more states have taken initiatives to address bullying, making it a requirement in maintaining a safe place for learning. Finding out if schools have actually been successful in bully-proofing is crucial in assessing what needs to change and what should stay the same.

A majority of studies exploring the school's response to bullying have found that many schools have general policies concerning appropriate behavior and discipline but none specifically about bullying. A study by Smith, Smith, Osborn and Samara (2008) found that schools were simply placing anti-bullying strategies under a broad category of behavior

interventions. In other words, if a teacher wanted to handle a bullying situation, he/she would use the guidelines presented under the basic behavioral policies. Even the states that do have specific anti-bullying policies fail to clearly state what constitutes as bullying. Limber and Small (2003) had found that out of the fifteen state laws that did specifically address bullying in schools, only nine had defined the range of behaviors that would be deemed as bullying. If the state neglects to provide a detailed description of bullying behavior, schools will be responsible for coming up with their own interpretations of state policies (Limber & Small, 2003). If schools are using different definitions to guide their implementation of the anti-bullying policy, this can lead to confusion and inconsistency among state schools.

Though the typical anti-bullying policy will include a definition of bullying according to its school, it will most likely disregard mention of other essential components in creating a safe environment such as the distinguishing characteristics of the different types of bullying and when or how a parent will be informed of their child's involvement in a bullying incident. Policies will tend to exclude any sort of guidance for response of anyone outside of teaching staff to bullying incidents, follow-up of immediate responses, more support for victims or bullies, a description of how records would be kept and used, preventative roles of peer support and issues of inclusiveness (Smith et. al., 2008). It seems as though anti-bullying policies are in serious need of revision so that they could include more critical information in dealing with bullying incidents. The results of a study conducted by Woods and Wolke (2003) had indicated that the schools who had more detailed and comprehensive policies had higher reports of bullying victimization. Furthermore, the study found that for the schools that did have anti-bullying policies, barely any had really enforced them into the school's daily practice. Out of the 39 schools that participated in the study, only a mere 26% had formed co-ordinated groups

concerning bullying and only one school had formally addressed bullying to the entire school (Woods & Wolke, 2003). Sherer and Nickerson (2010) mention the potential benefit of developing an anti-bullying committee in schools, something that has been used too inconsistently and infrequently to be considered efficient. However, even if a school's anti-bullying committee were to be on top of its game, this does not necessarily mean that it is utilizing the most effective approach. For example, using a "zero tolerance" act in response to bullying has been found to be unhelpful in dealing with the core issue (Findlay, 2011). A zero tolerance policy would require schools to conduct formal investigations of bullying complaints and would then penalize offenders according to a graduated system, which then only leads to a higher number of suspensions with no reduction in bullying incidents (Findlay, 2011). A zero tolerance policy aims to simply punish and would be absent of any educational aspect for bullies. Even a report explaining why students need schools to develop comprehensive anti-bullying policies done by Sacks and Salem (2009) insisted that punitive school policies aimed exclusively at disciplining misconduct are ineffective to transform school norms, doing nothing to keep from additional bullies to form, making bullying a cyclical and growing problem. Bullying will only escalate if the school chooses not to take preventative measures to intervene effectively. Once again, research is indicative that a majority of current anti-bullying policies could use some revamping and implementing in order to be effective for students.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools from the student perspective. The study will be both qualitative and quantitative in gathering data.

### **Sample**



For this study a convenience sample was drawn from freshman students currently enrolled at a Private Catholic College in New England. Freshmen were chosen because they are most likely to better recollect experiences of bullying, having just recently graduated from high school. All current freshman students at the college will be considered for the study.

### **Data Gathering**

The data for this study will be collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A consent form, notifying the participant of the purpose and confidentiality of the study, will be created and distributed to freshman students (See Appendix A). All students who signed the consent form acknowledge their voluntary participation in the study. Students signing the consent form also acknowledge their understanding of the confidential nature of the study. All participants were aware that their participation was used for the research study. After obtaining the student's signature, the student was asked to complete a survey consisting of questions regarding the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies at their high schools. A Likert scale will be used to produce questions for the surveys (See Appendix B). At the end of each survey a note asked if the student would like to participate further by participating in a follow-up interview with the researcher. The researcher's e-mail address was provided in the event that the student would be willing to be interviewed about their bullying experience, whether they were the bully, the victim or merely a witness. Interviews will be conducted using a previously-generated list of questions to serve as a guide (See Appendix C). The students interviewed were asked to discuss their account of bullying and their perspective on the effectiveness of school policies.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data obtained from completed surveys was analyzed using tables and charts created by the SPSS computer program. SPSS will be used to analyze how effective anti-bullying policies are at the high school level, according to this sample. As for qualitative data, interviews were utilized to check for any useful information concerning the schools' role in bullying intervention.

### **Findings**

This study sought to investigate the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools. College students were asked to give feedback regarding their high school's implementation and efforts for bullying prevention. It is through the perspective of the college students that the study determined the effectiveness of the policies.

Surveys were distributed to eighty Providence College freshmen students and all eighty were returned completed. Thirty-seven surveys were completed by male freshmen students and forty-three surveys were completed by female freshmen students. Only four of the respondents identified their ethnicity as one other than Caucasian. Two male participants were African American, one male was "other" and one female was "other". The rest of the seventy-seven respondents were Caucasian. Forty-two of the students who filled out surveys had attended a public high school and thirty-seven students had attended a private high school. One participant went to a high school that was neither public nor private.

The first three questions of the survey asked participants to identify themselves as having been a bully, a bullied victim or a bullying witness at least once in their high school experience. The tables below display the percentages of the respondents' answers regarding the first three questions.

Table 1 is a frequency table that shows the percentage of each response to Question one. 25 percent of the participants strongly disagreed and 25 percent disagreed with the statement that they have been a bully at least once in high school while 33.3 percent agreed and 6.3 percent strongly agreed that they had been a bully at least once in high school. Only 3.8 percent said they were neutral over the statement.

**Table 1: I identify myself as having been a bully at least once in high school.**

		Identified Bully			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	20	24.7	25.0	25.0
	Disagree	25	30.9	31.3	56.3
	Neutral	3	3.7	3.8	60.0
	Agree	27	33.3	33.8	93.8
	Strongly Agree	5	6.2	6.3	100.0
	Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		81	100.0		

Table 1a indicates how often a participant was a bully. 41 percent of participants responded to this question, meaning they have admitted to having been a bully at least once in high school.

**Table 1a: Identified bullies indicated how often they were a bully in high school.**

		Bully Frequency			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rarely	13	16.0	16.3	16.3
	Sometimes	12	14.8	15.0	31.3
	Often	6	7.4	7.5	38.8
	Always	1	1.2	1.3	40.0
	N/A	48	59.3	60.0	100.0

Total	80	98.8	100.0
Missing System	1	1.2	
Total	81	100.0	

Table 2 displays the frequency of the percentage of responses for Question two. 26.3 percent of participants strongly disagreed with having been a bullied victim at least once in high school, 22.5 percent disagreed, 17.5 percent were neutral, 26.3 percent agreed and 7.5 percent strongly agreed.

**Table 2: I have been a victim of bullying at least once in high school.**

		Identified Victim			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	21	25.9	26.3	26.3
	Disagree	18	22.2	22.5	48.8
	Neutral	14	17.3	17.5	66.3
	Agree	21	25.9	26.3	92.5
	Strongly Agree	6	7.4	7.5	100.0
	Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		81	100.0		

Table 2a displays the participant's indication of how often he or she was a victim of bullying in high school. A majority of the twenty-five participants who identified themselves as having been a bullied victim in high school said they had been bullied sometimes.

**Table 2a:**

		Victim Frequency			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rarely	6	7.4	7.5	7.5
	Sometimes	13	16.0	16.3	23.8

	Often	4	4.9	5.0	28.8
	Always	2	2.5	2.5	31.3
	N/A	55	67.9	68.8	100.0
	Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		81	100.0		

Table 3 is a frequency table showing the percentages of responses to Question three, the statement of having been a witness of a bullying incident at least once in high school. A majority of participants, 58.8 percent agree and 17.5 percent strongly agree, to have witnessed a bullying incident at least once in high school. Only 11.3 percent disagreed and 1.3 percent strongly disagreed.

**Table 3: I have witnessed a bullying incident take place at least once in high school.**

		Bully Witness			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.2	1.3	1.3
	Disagree	9	11.1	11.3	12.5
	Neutral	9	11.1	11.3	23.8
	Agree	47	58.0	58.8	82.5
	Strongly Agree	14	17.3	17.5	100.0
	Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		81	100.0		

Table 3a shows the response of participants who agreed or strongly agree with question 3. 33.8 percent of the participants said they witnessed a bully incident take place sometimes, 13.8 percent witnessed bullying incidents often and 2.5 percent always.

**Table 3a:**

#### Witness Frequency

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Rarely	16	19.8	20.0	22.5
	Sometimes	27	33.3	33.8	56.3
	Often	11	13.6	13.8	70.0
	Always	2	2.5	2.5	72.5
	N/A	22	27.2	27.5	100.0
	Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		81	100.0		

Figure 1 displays the mean score for question 4, which asked if the student thought bullying was a major issue in their high school. The mean score for this question was 2.66, indicating that most students felt neutral but closer to disagreement that bullying was a major issue.

**Figure 1: Bullying was a major issue at my high school.**

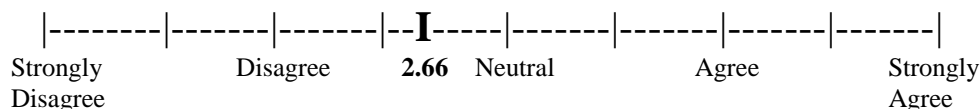


Figure 2 shows the mean score for Question 5, asking students if they were aware of an anti-bullying policy in their high school. The mean score for this question was approximately 3.99; meaning most agreed that they knew of such a policy at their high school.

**Figure 2: I am aware that there was an anti-bullying policy at my high school.**

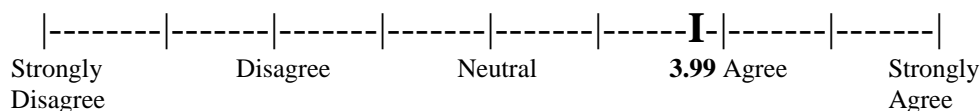
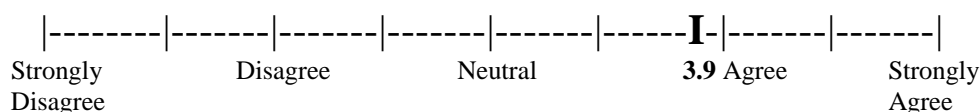


Figure 3 presents the mean score for Question 6, asking students if they remembered whether or not their high school held some form of bullying-prevention presentation mandatory for all students. The mean score for Question 6 was a 3.9, meaning many of the participants did recall having attended a mandatory bullying prevention and awareness program during high school.

**Figure 3: My high school held a mandatory school-wide assembly or other form of lecture for students concerning bullying awareness and prevention.**

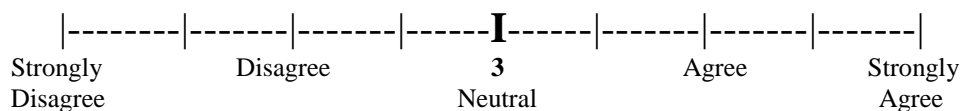


For Question 6, students described what kind of assembly and/or form of lecture was mandated by their high school. Thirty-two participants wrote a description for this question. Some of the responses include specific names of anti-bullying movements that presented at their schools. Seven respondents named “Rachel’s Challenge” which provides training sessions promoting positive and safe change, in memory of the first person killed in the Columbine shootings. Several responses indicated that students were required to attend assemblies regarding the anti-bullying policy, special guest speakers, and presentations on the consequences of bullying as well as assemblies specific to cyber-bullying. One participant had commented that their high school, “Never really had an assembly solely devoted to bullying”. A majority of the participants who wrote comments had received some form of a bullying prevention and awareness presentation at their high school.

Figure 4 displays the mean score of the responses for Question 7 which asked students if they thought students in their high school felt comfortable enough to report bullying incidents to the school. The mean score for this question was approximately 3, meaning most students were

either neutral on their perceived comfort of students to report bullying incidents or that the responses amongst the participants were split between agreement and disagreement.

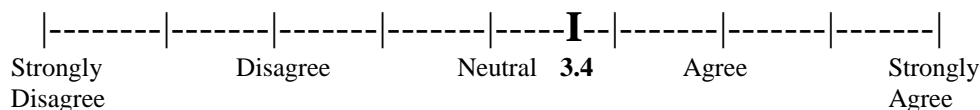
**Figure 4: I believe students felt comfortable to report bullying incidents to the appropriate school personnel.**



Participants who responded with either Agree or Strongly Agree to Question 7 were asked to note to whom he/she believed students in their high school felt comfortable to report bullying incidents to. Sixteen participants had written responses that varied from guidance counselors, the vice principal, the nurse, the principal, teacher, to the school chaplain. The most common response was the guidance counselor as the person to report bullying incidents to.

Figure 5 displays the mean score for Question eight, asking the participant if he/she believed their high school's response to bullying had a beneficial impact, preventing further bullying from occurring. The mean score of this question was 3.4, meaning there were more students who felt as though their high school's response to bullying incidents were effective in the prevention of further bullying.

**Figure 5: I believe my high school responded to bullying incidents in a manner which helped prevent further bullying from taking place.**



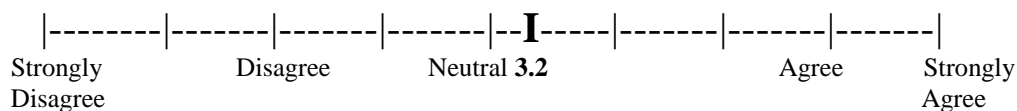
Nineteen participants had added comments regarding their response to Question 8. One participant had disclosed that the, "culture of respect was well-promoted," and that, "reported



incidents were taken seriously,” by the high school. Another student had shared her thoughts that, “teenagers are difficult to monitor. Sometimes getting adults involved worsen situations”. Another participant had said that bullying incidents were still occurring even after assemblies, other responses were relative to this in that punishments were minimal. One student, in particular, had stated that her, “school seemed to look the other way when real incidents took place,” which is why she thought that a lot of it was “not reported”. However, there were a few comments that indicated their agreement that their high school did indeed help prevent further bullying, stating that “students were in big trouble if they bullied others” as the policy was strictly enforced in some high schools.

Figure 6 presents the mean score for Question nine, asking if the participant deemed their high school’s effort to implement an anti-bullying policy as effective. The mean score for this question was 3.2. A mean score of 3.2 indicates that most participants were in-between neutral and agreement in considering the effectiveness of their high schools’ implementation of the anti-bullying policy.

**Figure 6: I would consider the efforts and measures my high school made to implement the anti-bullying policy as effective.**

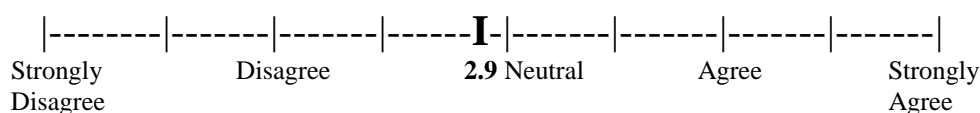


For Question 9 on the survey instrument, participants were able to write additional comments on their high school’s efforts in implementing the anti-bullying policy. Six participants chose to write comments. One participant had disclosed that “people sometimes thought the assemblies were a joke” and another student had written that even after bullies received punishments, the bullying continued. Another participant had made the comment that

the high school's implementation was only effective "to the bullying that was reported to teachers". The mean score was 3.3 meaning that participants were split in their level of agreement.

Figure 7 shows the mean score of Question 10. Question 10 asked participants to what extent they agreed or disagreed that bullying prevention in their high school could be improved if there were changes made to the anti-bullying policy. The mean score for this question was about 2.9, falling closely to the neutral part of the agreement scale.

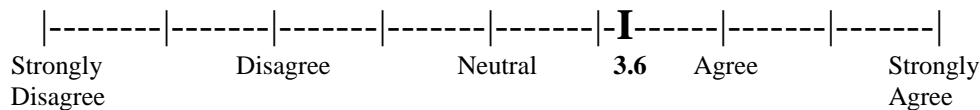
**Figure 7: I believe bullying prevention would be more effective if there were changes made to the anti-bullying policy.**



Participants were asked to reveal what changes they would make to the policy under Question 10. Fourteen responses were recorded from participants. Responses varied from comments that the policy was fine to comments that more enforcement was needed. Several participants wrote that more involvement from the administration could have been more effective. One participant specifically identified a problem: "Some policies discriminate against groups like homosexuals". Another student had written that, "No one really takes bullying seriously.... It's kind of a joke". The responses were mixed in terms of whether or not participants thought more could have been done to the policy to make it more effective.

Figure 8 presents the mean score of Question eleven. This question asked if they thought, in general, anti-bullying policies were beneficial in bullying prevention for high schools. The mean score for this question was 3.6, indicating that most of the participants responded that they agreed that anti-bullying policies were beneficial in the bullying prevention cause.

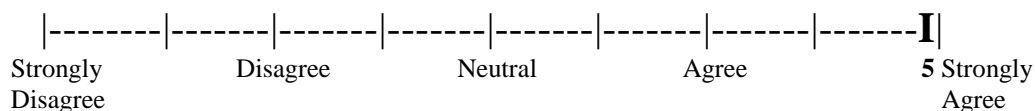
**Figure 8: Anti-bullying policies make a beneficial impact in the effort to prevent bullying in high school.**



Comments were provided by seven participants from the collected surveys under Question 11, which asked about the impact high schools' efforts had on the student body bullying culture. Five out of seven of the responses were positive, indicating that the schools' efforts were beneficial and made students "think twice" about bullying. Two of the responses were negative, one saying that people weren't even aware of the policies and another stating that the policies, "didn't seem to help in my school" and that "teachers ignored it".

Figure 9 shows the mean score for question twelve, the final question of the survey. This question was only to be answered by participants that identified themselves as having been a victim of bullying. Bullied victims were asked if they personally thought the anti-bullying policy at their high school was enforced. The mean score for this question was 5, indicating that the participants who have identified themselves as having been a victim of bullying at least once in high school strongly agreed that the anti-bullying policy at their high school was indeed enforced.

**Figure 9: As a bullied victim, I believe the anti-bullying policy at my high school was enforced.**



By answering Question 12, participants identified themselves as having been a victim of bullying in high school. Nineteen participants were bullied victims and four of these victims had written comments for Question 12. One victim declared that the anti-bullying policy at their high school was only enforced if a teacher had witnessed the bullying incident. Another self-identified bullied victim had said that, “people who bullied me were never punished”. Another participant disclosed their reason for not reporting the bullying she experienced, saying that, “I didn’t report it because you don’t want to be considered a snitch”.

None of the participants followed-up with the completed survey to partake in a confidential interview with the researcher to further discuss his or her bullying experiences. Therefore, there was no further qualitative data in this research study.

### **Summary and Implications**

An overwhelming percentage of participants in this study admitted to having witnessed a bullying incident take place in their high school at least once, which corresponds to the rising popularity of bullying awareness and prevention across the nation. Being that a large number of participants had been exposed to bullying at some point in their high school career, their responses contained more credibility in the analysis of implemented bullying prevention efforts. A majority of the overall mean scores for student responses in this study fell close to the neutral range, indicating that the students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies at their high schools were considerably mixed. Participants had varied responses in determining how effective their high schools were in delivering formal anti-bullying policies. There were students who would agree that their high school’s bullying prevention tactics had a positive impact yet there were a similar number of students who said the opposite, that their schools did not have a beneficial impact in creating a bullying-free learning environment. The written

comments on the surveys provided greater insight on the issue but consisted of opposing opinions regarding the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies as well.

The study did find that almost all participants were aware that an anti-bullying policy was in place at their high school. In regards to how comfortable students believed people felt in reporting bullying incidents, there was not a strong level of agreement. Considering several past studies which have indicated the severe amount of bullying that went underreported, this may be concerning (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). The mean score of students' perceptions of how well the school's response was to bullying incidents that were reported fell to the neutral range of 3.2. A study by Mishna (2004) did report a few positive experiences students had in reporting bullying incidents, believing that bullies became friendlier as a result. The reviews of bullying reporting are mixed, however, and therefore it is difficult to determine this aspect of the anti-bullying campaign. When the survey asked directly if students felt that their high school's implementation of the anti-bullying policy was effective, the responses were again mixed. Specific comments made by students, however, did express a lack of serious consideration amongst students in response to their school's efforts, saying, "people sometimes thought the assemblies were a joke." Other comments expressed doubt in their school's ability to prevent further bullying.

The scores on the inquiries about students' perceptions on the effectiveness and beneficial impact their high schools had in delivering the anti-bullying policy also were scattered, producing neutral mean scores. Many had commented that the policy was fine the way it is, one student even saying that they thought it made students "think twice". Among the negative responses, there were a few comments that indicated that a lot of bullying went ignored by staff. Such findings were compatible with the study conducted by Bauman, Rigby and Hoppa (2008), which found that a majority felt that getting the school involved did not change the

situation but made it worse. An interesting discovery in the data, however, came in the final question of the survey that was only to be answered by students who admitted to being a bullied victim in high school. Mostly every one of the responses agreed that, yes, the anti-bullying policy at their high school was enforced. What makes this noteworthy is the fact that, according to this particular study, the bullying targets are the ones who perceived their school's policy as effective. It is possible that high schools' whose students had agreed that policies were enforced are the ones that had specific policies, adding to its effective implementation (Limber & Small, 2003). The four out of nineteen students who had provided negative feedback such as "people who bullied were never punished" or "I didn't report it because you don't want to be considered a snitch" may have been the ones who attended schools which had vague policies. Past literature has suggested that most policies fail to include a clear explanation about addressing bullying issues, such as the teachers' expected duty and role when a student reports a bullying incident (Smith et. al., 2008).

Though the results of the surveys were informative, the study had limitations. Ideally it would have been beneficial if more than eighty surveys were completed and returned. A larger sample would have provided more credibility and reliability. An additional limitation lies in the lack of diversity amongst the participants. Only four out of the eighty students who participated in the study identified their ethnicity as something other than Caucasian. Due to the lack of variance in ethnicity, this study may not be significantly helpful in determining the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools serving a diverse population of students. Furthermore, almost half of the students had disclosed attending a private high school, possibly skewing the overall perceived effectiveness. The study does not necessarily account for those high schools in urban locations. A final limitation may possibly be that student responses were not as precise,

being almost a year out of high school. If students who had graduated from high school even more recently participated in the survey, their memories may have been sharper and therefore could have offered more useful information.

This study serves as a helpful tool to better understand the anti-bullying policies that are being implemented in schools today and their effectiveness. The findings may offer high schools suggestions to re-evaluate their policies and efforts in creating a safer learning environment. Bullying is a serious issue, which should not be overlooked, and therefore it is important for school administration to pay special attention to the issue. The school social worker, in particular, carries a considerable role in bringing about violence prevention and can highly benefit from the gathered data. Any person working in the educational department, in general, may find this new, recent information useful in building their own professional competency.

It is still difficult to determine whether or not anti-bullying policies in high schools have actually been effective. It would perhaps be better understood if further research investigated the issue by breaking it down amongst public versus private high schools and urban versus suburban. The sample used for this study was for the most part split in their level of agreement with the content of the survey. Despite the limitations of the study and the fact that a majority of questions did not have statistically significant mean scores, valuable knowledge was gained from the study.

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## Appendix A

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a social work major at Providence College, inviting you to participate in a study to explore the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in high schools. Data gathered in this study will be reported in a thesis paper in a social work capstone course at Providence College. It will also be added to the Providence College digital commons database.

At this time, freshman students currently enrolled at Providence College are being recruited for this research. Participation will involve answering questions about bullying experiences in high school. The surveys will be used as data for research and will not be further used for other purposes besides this study.

There are no anticipated significant risks associated with involvement in this research. There is always the possibility that uncomfortable or stressful memories or emotions may arise while thinking about these past experiences.

Benefits of participating in this study include helping researchers to formulate a better understanding of the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies implemented in high schools in order to potentially improve future practice in schools systems.

Confidentiality will be protected by storing signed consent forms separately from data obtained in the study. Once the data are obtained, all identifying information linking the participant to his or her response will be destroyed so that responses can no longer be identified with individuals. Data will be reported by making generalizations of all the data that has been gathered. Brief excerpts of individual responses may be quoted without any personal identifying information.

Participation in this study is voluntary and should last no more than 5-10 minutes. A decision to decline participation will not have any negative effects for you. You may withdraw from the study at any time up until Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup> when the researchers will finalize the data.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY.**

Thank you for participating in this study.

Angela Ju, Social Work Student, (203) 561-2236, [aju@friars.providence.edu](mailto:aju@friars.providence.edu)

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(Name)

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(Date)

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

## Appendix B

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of High School Attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Public \_\_\_\_\_ Private \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please Specify)

Directions: Read the following statements and circle the response which best fits your high school experience.

1. I identify myself as having been a bully at least once in high school.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

**If you responded Agree or Strongly Agree**, please indicate how often by circling a response below:

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Never                  Rarely                  Sometimes                  Often                  All The Time

2. I have been a victim of bullying at least once in high school.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

**If you responded Agree or Strongly Agree**, please indicate how often by circling a response below:

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Never                  Rarely                  Sometimes                  Often                  All The Time

3. I have witnessed a bullying incident take place at least once in high school.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

**If you responded Agree or Strongly Agree**, please indicate how often by circling a response below:

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Never                  Rarely                  Sometimes                  Often                  All The Time

4. Bullying was a major issue at my high school.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

5. I am aware that there was an anti-bullying policy at my high school.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

6. My high school held a mandatory school-wide assembly or other form of lecture for students concerning bullying awareness and prevention.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. I believe students felt comfortable to report bullying incidents to the appropriate school personnel.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

**If you responded Agree or Strongly Agree,** please note to whom you believed students felt comfortable to report bullying incidents to: \_\_\_\_\_

8. I believe my high school responded to bullying incidents in a manner which helped prevent further bullying from taking place.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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9. I would consider the efforts and measures my high school made to implement the anti-bullying policy as effective.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

10. I believe bullying prevention would be more effective if there were changes made to the anti-bullying policy.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

What changes would you make to the policy? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Anti-bullying policies make a beneficial impact in the effort to prevent bullying in high schools.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

12. **Please only respond if you were a victim of bullying:** As a bullied victim, I believe the anti-bullying policy at my high school was enforced.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|  
 Strongly Disagree                  Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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If you would like to further your participation in this study by sharing your experiences of bullying in a confidential interview, please contact me at [aju@friars.providence.edu](mailto:aju@friars.providence.edu).

Interviews should last no more than 15-20 minutes. Thank you.

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### Appendix C

1. Were you ever a bully, a bullied victim or both in high school?
2. Can you describe your bullying experience in high school?
3. What was done in response to bullying incidents that took place in high school?
4. Do you think your high school did enough in preventing further bullying?
5. What did your high school do that made a difference in creating a safer school environment?
6. Do you believe that your high school should have done more to prevent bullying? Please explain.
7. Overall, do you believe anti-bullying policies are effective in high schools? Why or why not?
8. Do you have any suggestions as to what high schools should do in order to have a more effective anti-bullying policy?