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Prevalence of Bullying at the Elementary School Level: A Descriptive Analysis

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Abstract

A quantitative, descriptive study on the prevalence of bullying at the elementary school level was conducted in Providence, Rhode Island. A review of the literature outlined the definition of what aggressive behavior constitutes as bullying, details the aggressor and target roles and confirms the potentially harmful consequences of bullying. Factors such as the aggressor and target's grade level, gender and race were documented to explore whether these factors held an influential role in the bullying incidents. Findings suggested that elementary aged children bully students within their same grade and of similar gender. Another finding revealed that race is not a determinant factor for children when they bully other students because targets and aggressors extended across a wide range of races. This study confirmed a high rate of bullying incidents at the elementary school level. Future research could extend this work by examining the intentions behind bullying incidents and aggressive episodes.

Prevalence of Bullying at the Elementary School Level: A Descriptive Analysis

The issue of bullying has become such a prevalent problem within the school environment and its chronic and aggressive nature is negatively affecting children and their experiences at school. When discussing the issue of bullying, it is important to define what constitutes aggressive behavior as bullying. Bullying is commonly defined as "repeated interpersonal behavior, which is intended to do physical or psychological harm, typically between children with unequal power" (Child Trends, 2012). Although little research has been done regarding the prevalence of bullying, specifically in elementary schools, national statistics have revealed that bullying in schools has risen since 2001 (Child Trends, 2012). Because this study is looking at the prevalence rate of bullying in an elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island, it would be important to examine the number of children who are involved in bullying incidents and to determine what demographics prove to contribute the most to the confrontations. Rhode Island's population of 1,048,319 (2000 census), 183,456 or 17.5% are school children between the ages of 5 and 18 (High, 2000). Of these, 30,032 were involved with bullying incidents as either victims or bullies (High, 2000).

Bullying at such a young age is also significant and relevant to the field of social work because of how closely school social workers interact with students. Bullying has become a chronic issue that is affecting more and more children and creating various problems within the school environment. School social workers work closely with students who both are bullying and being victimized and for this reason, should understand the incidence of bullying within the school setting. Social workers must also learn effective ways of combating the issue to make the school environment a safer and friendlier setting for all students.

This research study will examine the prevalence of bullying at the elementary school level. Furthermore it will focus on the gender, grade and race of students who are bullying and students who are being victimized. I became interested in this area of study because I am interning at an elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island for my senior practicum. As part of my experience, I am working closely with the students involved in bullying incidents. Gathering incidence rate and the type of bullying can further add to the literature on bullying. Finally, recommendations will be made to the school and staff regarding the implementation of anti-bullying policies in an effort to ensure a safer school environment.

Literature Review

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a concept that is widely discussed and frequently addressed by the media. It is an issue that affects a wide majority of students throughout their educational experience. The 2000 census revealed that out of the 53,908,568 children of school age 5 to 18, 8,824,833 or 16.37% are involved in bullying incidents (High, 2001). Additionally, The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (Child Trends, 2012) supported this finding when it found that, "fourteen percent of students, ages 12 through 18, reported being bullied during school in 2001, a proportion that increased to 28 percent in 2005 and 32 percent in 2007, but fell to 28 percent in 2009". But what aggressive actions can actually be classified as bullying? Is it teasing and name-calling or is it physical harm being inflicted upon another?

Research has shown that bullying is comprised of two main elements: power and repetition. The first of these elements is exemplified by the possession of power one individual has over another. This notion is supported by Craig and Pepler (2007) who state that "bullying is a form of aggressive behavior imposed from a position of power: children who bully always

have more power than the children they victimize" (p. 86). Research by Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) supports this notion of power imbalance when they stated that "often, the perpetrators use bullying as a means to establish dominance or maintain status" (p. 101).

Craig and Pepler (2007) elaborated that this power stems from both physical advantages and social advantages. Bullies tend to have a size or strength advantage over their victim. But they may also have a social advantage if they hold a higher social status in a peer group; such as a popular student compared to a rejected student. They also included the aspects of strength through numbers and strength through systemic power. The children in groups, who bully a lone child, hold a great deal more power than the individual being victimized. Children can also bully by targeting different systemic groups. These may include, but aren't limited to, students of racial or cultural groups, disability, economic disadvantage or sexual minorities.

Research by Espelage and Asidao (2001) also spotlights this element of power as an integral component of bullying. They state that "bullying behaviors are more systematic and self-initiated as students who bully carefully select their victims and create encounters in which they can control others" (p. 51). This finding would suggest and reiterate that bullies carefully pick their victims so as to ensure an easy and vulnerable target.

Research by Williford et al. (2010) also identifies power as a defining component to the definition of bullying. They state that "overt and relational forms of aggression are often identified as bullying behaviors when they involve an imbalance of power" (p. 645). Jones, Manstead, and Livingstone (2009) also supported this because their findings prove to support the notion that bullying is found "in any setting where power relations exist" (p. 853). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) were also in agreement with these findings because they found that "typically, a power imbalance exists between the bully and the victim, with the bully being either

physically or psychologically more powerful" (p. 101). Finally, findings by Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) also support this power differential when they defined bullying as "a distinct type of proactive aggression characterized by a power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim" (p. 295).

Research has also found that the second factor bullying encompasses is aggressive behavior that is repetitive and persistent. Craig and Pepler (2007) identify this second instrumental element in their discussion of bullying. They recognize that bullying is an aggressive action that is repeated over time. Specifically, "with each repeated bullying incident, the power relations become consolidated: the child who is bullying increases power and the child who is being victimized loses power" (p. 86). In this way, bullying is not a one-time incident; it is a repetitive aggressive action taken out on the same individual by the same aggressor.

Espelage and Asidao (2007) also recognize this dimension of repetition in their definition of bullying. They state that, "unlike other aggressive youth, students who bully tend to repeatedly attack their victims" (p. 51). In this sense, bullies "breakdown" their victim by continually tormenting and belittling their chosen target. Research by Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) also recognized that bullying behavior is characterized by its repetitive occurrence.

Finally, research by Williford et al. (2010) also encompasses this element of recurrence when they recognize that "overt and relational forms of aggression are often identified as bullying behaviors when they occur frequently and are chronic in nature" (p. 645). Research by Guerra, Wiliams, and Sadek (2011) also supports the notion that bullying is repetitive in nature which differentiates it from just aggressive behavior. They state that, "bullying is a distinct type of proactive aggression that typically involves repetition" (p. 295).

While most research identified two main dimensions, possession of power and the infliction of repetitive aggressive behavior upon the same student, Espelage and Asidao (2007) identify a third component that is integral to the definition and understanding of bullying. They state that bullying "behaviors often include a variety of hurtful actions in addition to physical attacks, such as name calling, social exclusion, taking and damaging belongings, extortion, nasty rumors, and verbal threats" (p. 51). Bullies draw on multiple tactics to target their victim. Not only are direct methods used, such as name calling and damaging another's belongings but also indirect methods, such as spreading malicious rumors, are used to tear down a victim.

Since this study is examining the prevalence of bullying in an elementary school located in Providence, Rhode Island, it is crucial to examine the definition of bullying used by the Providence Public School District:

> Bullying is defined as the victimization, intimidation or mistreatment by others in the school community, based on unequal physical, psychological or social power or perceived power. Bullying does include cyber-bullying and hazing. Bullying implies behaviors that can cause physical and/or emotional harm, are unwelcomed, intentional, unprovoked, and usually repeated. Bullying can be verbal, physical, direct (face-to-face), or indirect (e.g. through another person, in writing, etc.) (Providence Public Schools, p. 5)

The Providence School District distinctly lays out what they classify as bullying so they can ensure the safety of all their students and decrease the risk of student victimization. Specifically, they believe that "preventing bullying is critical for maintaining a safe, secure and positive school climate and culture, which in turn supports academic achievement, increases school engagement, respects the rights of all individuals and groups, and purposefully builds community" (p. 4).

For this study, the working definition used for bullying is any repetitive, aggressive behavior that victimizes or mistreats an individual based on control or possession of power over another individual. This includes physical maltreatment, verbal abuse and emotional harm.

After establishing and understanding what traits and factors encompass bullying, it is imperative to understand the dynamic between the student doing the bullying and the student who is being victimized. Understanding these roles will better equip school administration and staff to effectively protect students from victimization and establish a sense of community within a school.

This bullying-victim dynamic is described by Craig and Pepler (2007) as a destructive relationship problem. The problem develops and evolves because "children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others; and children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and unable to defend themselves from this peer abuse" (p. 86). This continuous cycle of patterned behavior is destructive and unhealthy for all parties involved.

The Bully & The Victim

So who are the typical bully and victim? What characteristics make them the aggressor and the victimized? Stereotypically bullies are usually perceived as children who are physically larger and more aggressive and their targets are students who are smaller, weaker and quieter (Espelage and Asidao, 2001). Research has found that in many instances, these roles are accurately filled by individuals fitting these descriptions. For example, research has proven that children who are victimized are younger and physically undersized compared to their attacker.

Espelage and Asidao (2001) found that bullying victims are typically younger and physically different than their victimizer. Additionally, victims also tend to be ethnic minority students or students who have less money, fewer fashionable clothes, wear glasses or are overweight. Craig and Pepler (2007) supported Espelage and Asidao's (2001) findings because

they also found that students are strategically picked based on a variety of attributes such as, obesity, learning problems, sexual orientation and family background.

On the other side of the relationship lies the bully. Research has found that an individual who bullies is usually of larger physical stature and tends to be more aggressive than their victim. One of the most distinct characteristics of a bully is that he/she targets and zones in on a select individual and belittles their chosen target. Espelage and Asidao (2001) detailed a sketch of this typical bully as:

> having a positive attitude toward violence, impulsivity, a strong need to dominate others, and little empathy for victims. They are average or slightly below average in popularity, are surrounded by a small group of peers, and are usually physically stronger than their victims (if male). They are usually motivated by a need for power, are rewarded by their aggression with both positive and negative attention from their peers and teachers, and are more likely to grow up in hostile family environments (p. 53).

This power that bullies possess over their victim is acquired by knowing another's vulnerabilities and using that knowledge to cause distress (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

Potential Long Lasting Effects of Being a Bully and Victim

Using power and knowing one's vulnerabilities, can create long-lasting effects on the bully and victim. Bullying affects all who are aware of its presence. This includes the students who participate in the aggressive behavior, students who fall prey to the aggressor and students who know it is occurring around them and know it is affecting their peers. The potential for long-term difficulties is prevalent among all individuals exposed to the bullying.

First of all, the most vulnerable population for experiencing long-term problems is students who are victimized. Examining how the victimized student is affected is crucial because the ramifications are short term and long term for these children and can be very devastating. It is common for children who are bullied to become ostracized from peer groups and often spend much of their time isolated for others. This process often takes two forms: the

student who is being victimized tends to pull away from peer interactions in fear of being bullied and secondly, the student is not accepted by peers because peers are reluctant to be associated with a victim, in fear of becoming bullied also.

Craig & Pepler (2007) detail this first way children become isolated by stating "children who are victimized tend to withdraw from peer interactions. They are at risk of becoming socially anxious and increasingly hesitant to engage in social activities, even refusing to attend school, in order to protect themselves from bullying" (p. 88). Not only do bullied children retreat from peer groups and social interactions, they begin to fear attending school. They begin to perceive absence as the only solution for the bullying to cease. Additionally, Van Lier et al. (2012) support this component of a student's withdrawal because they found that "boys who are victimized by their peers because they are shy and withdrawn might become resentful toward their peers and become disengaged from school" (p. 1776). It appears from previous research that high levels of bullying and victimization is directly correlated to an increased desire to skip school, thus isolating the student.

Research by Craig and Pepler (2007) also identifies the second element of victim isolation and scrutiny as a retreatment of fellow peers in fear of falling prey to bullies as well. Children who are targeted usually do not have many friends because their peers are scared to associate with them in fear of becoming victimized as well. Sometimes, children will decide to join the social group that bullies the victim because they feel they will be protected and accepted by those in power (Craig and Pepler, 2007). This extensive process wreaks havoc on the victimized children because "they lack the normative social interactions that are critical to their healthy development and emerging relationship capacity" (p. 88). These consequences prove so

detrimental because they ultimately "impair many social capacities essential for healthy social engagement" (p. 88).

Again, research conducted by Van Lier et al. (2012) also supports the notion that students become further isolated and they perceive the school environment as a place that is no longer welcoming or safe. They stated that "early difficulties in peer relationships may lead to a poor self-appraisal, self-blame, low self-esteem, negative self-beliefs, feelings of loneliness, and fear of daily punishment in their nonfriendly school environment" (p. 1776). In addition to these long standing effects, children who are victimized when they are young, experience anxiety, depression and somatic difficulties when they are older. Research by Craig & Pepler (2007) has found that the fear and hurt that was experienced during childhood, can carry over to their adult relationships. Childhood victims can also suffer personal and social difficulties in the future.

Another side effect that can arise from years of harassment and victimization is that previously victimized children may become bullies because they see the power they can exert over others, who are weaker and more vulnerable than themselves and they enjoy having this control. Research by Espelage and Asidao (2001) supports this shift in roles when they found that students who were once bullied and now victimized other students "reported a history of victimization and felt that they harassed other students because it was their turn to be a bully" (p. 60). They described this classification of student as the bully-victim subtype. With this role reversal, it is also imperative to look at the long term effects' bullying has on those children who victimize other children. Research has shown that the aggressive behavior bullies exhibit when they are younger translates over to young adulthood.

Research by Craig & Pepler (2007) found that children who continue to bully and harass other students are at risk for long term problems with antisocial behavior and substance abuse.

As these children grow older, the aggression and power lessons they learned when they were young, can lead to greater and more dangerous problems. These would include sexual harassment, dating aggression, and possibly even harassment in the work place, as well as, marital, child, and elder abuse (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

Research by Williford et al. (2010) also supports these previous findings of increased aggressive and destructive behavior as these children grow older. They found that a large portion of the students who victimized their peers in elementary school continued to harass and bully them throughout middle school as well. They found that "this finding is consistent with work in developmental criminology that reveals a progression of involvement in delinquency and other antisocial conduct for some youth as they leave childhood and enter adolescence" (p. 646).

As research has shown, children who bully and harass their peers during childhood, have a greater risk of committing more aggressive behavior when they are older, which may result in higher levels of crime and delinquency and ultimately a greater problem for society.

The Role of Group Acceptance

Group membership is another leading cause of the high prevalence of bullying. Often times, acceptance into a peer group, controls and alters a child's behavior. Research has proven that children are driven by their desire to be accepted by a peer group. But sometimes the drive to be accepted controls a child's behavior in a destructive way and they view bullying as an avenue that will lead them to group acceptance.

Jones, Manstead, and Livingstone (2009) identify the role of group norms and the significance that the group plays in children's lives. They explained that when children define themselves in terms of group membership, "group members will tend to conform to the attitudes and behaviors that are typical of a given group, which differentiate it from other groups.

Conformity to group norms is likely to be greater when social identity is drawn to a group member's attention" (p. 855). This explanation identifies why children feel the initial need to establish a relationship with a group and the significance that the group dynamic holds.

Jones, Manstead, and Livingstone (2009) also identify how group membership influences children's behavior. "Part of a person's self-concept- their social identity- derives from group memberships. Group members are motivated to positively differentiate their in-group from comparison out-groups, and in many cases to actively favor the in-group and its members" (p. 854). For these reasons, children are quick to identify with a peer group because they are looking for acceptance.

Although, research has also found that group acceptance can sometimes result in destructive and hurtful behavior. Williford et al. (2011) supports this concept with their findings that "the desire for acceptance by peers and the willingness to experiment with new social roles, in turn, increases the likelihood of aggression and victimization" (p. 646). In search of peer acceptance, students become more willing to victimize and harass their peers who have been targeted by the peer group because they realize this will assist their social standing in the group. Espelage and Asidao (2001) found similar results because when they surveyed students they found that "participants indicated that they often teased other students to go along with the crowd or to fit in but also recognized that they were upsetting their targets." (p. 56). Students who tease and harass other students to gain acceptance by their group, understand that their behavior is hurtful and destructive but continue because they seek acceptance. In this same way, students participate in bullying and harassment because they are concerned if they do not, they will soon become the group's target and fall victim to this bullying. In essence, students bully others to protect themselves from falling victim to the same abuse.

How Should Bullying Be Combated?

Knowing what bullying is and how it affects each party involved, how are schools combating the issue? The school setting is the most important environment to focus on because the majority of bullying and harassment takes place in this setting. Espelage and Asidao (2001) found that bullying is everywhere in school. "Bullying is witnessed in the hallways, cafeteria, locker rooms, bathrooms, during recess, during passing periods, and outside the school. "Many students mentioned that bullying took place out of sight and hearing distance of teachers" (p. 56). Due to the fact that bullying takes place all over the school and throughout the entire day, how are schools targeting the issue?

As the issue of bullying has become widespread, school-based programs have become more prominent in an effort to target and reduce the malicious behavior. As Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) found in their research, "the quick rise in popularity of bullying prevention as a topic of school-based programming, legislation, and public concern both reflects and gives rise to a general perception that bullying is ubiquitous at school" (p. 296). Knowing that bullying and harassment is ever-present within the school walls is the first step to diminishing its presence and power.

Another key component to establishing and implementing antibullying programs, is to understand that bullying is not committed by just one age group or just one gender. In a similar manner, it is also crucial to understand that those students who are victimized are also not just one age or just one gender; bullying affects all ages and all genders. For this reason, schools must implement programs that encompass all students and target all types of bullying. Research by Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) supports this style of program implementation:

Because bullying is a complex behavior embedded in a social context, mixed methods studies that include both quantitative and qualitative components can enhance our

understanding of the dynamics of bullying and how it varies across different developmental stages and in different school settings. This type of integrative approach provides for validation of individual patterns derived from surveys and simultaneously allows for identification of previously unstudied or emergent patterns grounded in the daily lives of youth (p. 296).

In a similar manner of targeting ages and genders of children in a school to address and combat the issue of bullying, it is also imperative to incorporate all the integral members of the school staff and the children's parents. Craig and Pepler (2007) reiterated this concept through their research and findings, noting that "a systematic perspective highlights the need for changes in awareness and behavior strategies not only for those children who are directly involved, but also for their peers, their teachers, their parents, and beyond in the broader community" (p. 89).

Addressing the issue of bullying across a wide audience is integral when combating the problem. For this reason it is important to incorporate individuals such as other peers and adults/parents/teachers that are not directly affected by the harassment. Incorporating peers into anti bullying programs and interventions is vital because they can serve as both, reinforcement for the bullying or they can serve as an ally and help defend the student who is being victimized. Craig and Pepler (2007) discussed this theory in greater detail:

Therefore, interventions must occur within the classroom and be broad in scope to promote positive interactions and social experiences of all children. Interventions to counter the peer processes that exacerbate bullying focus on supporting positive interactions, discouraging bullying, promoting empathy for victimized children, and encouraging children to intervene in bullying (p. 89).

Additionally, adults, such as parents and teachers also play an important part in this process because adults are responsible for ensuring children have a safe and positive environment to grow and establish healthy relationships with one another.

Overall, research could support establishing an anti-bullying program within a school that encompasses all students and involves parents and teachers. This seems to be the most effective approach to decreasing the amount of bullying and harassment that take place.

Conclusions

Based on the review of the literature, it is evident that bullying is an important and serious issue that impacts the school environment and continues to be an issue that plagues the educational atmosphere. The research underscores that, bullying is distinguishable from other forms of aggressive behavior based on two factors: the element of power and being repetitive in nature. It was also supported that bullying is harmful for all individuals involved because of the long term, negative effects it has on children.

It is also important to reiterate the significance of the role that group acceptance plays in the continuation of bullying. As children seek to be accepted by a peer group, the potential for bullying increases, making the school environment unfriendly and unwelcoming. To combat this issue, the literature supports that schools must take a pro-active approach to confronting the issue. To do so, schools must acknowledge there is an issue and then implement school-based programs that incorporate students, parents, and teachers.

Based on the review of the literature, this research study will examine the prevalence of bullying in a public elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island. This study intends to develop a better understanding of who is doing the bullying and the types of bullying that are currently taking place within the school. It will make recommendations for the school to understand the incidence of bullying.

Specifically, the study findings will gather the occurrence of bullying at one inner city school by gender, race, and grade level. This documentation may potentially reveal incident rates of bullying. Finally recommendations will be made based on the data analyzed.

Methodology

This is a quantitative, descriptive study on the prevalence of bullying in an elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island. The study is classified as a prospective study because findings are being documented and compiled as referrals to the school social worker and intern are made. Characteristics are gathered about each referral. The study will specifically address various research questions including: How prevalent is bullying in the elementary school based on the bully and the victim's grade level, gender, and race? What type of bullying is used by elementary aged children? What type of school-based program is already in place at the school and what improvements may prove to be beneficial after compiling all the incidents of bullying?

Subjects

The study will examine a wide sample of students. The subjects will be a convenience sample from an elementary school in Providence, Rhode Island. To be specific, the study will look closely at the grade level, gender, and race of students who are bullying and students who are being victimized. As referrals for bullying are made, characteristics of each student are gathered with no identifying information included.

Data Gathering

The study gathered data by keeping a record of all the bullying incidents that occurred from August 2012 to March 2013. The research was gathered by the school social worker and the social work intern. Referrals of bullying incidents were documented by teachers and/or staff, using the Incident Complaint Reporting Form (see Appendix A) and then reported to the school

social worker and social work intern. The school social worker and intern then met with all

students involved in the incident and determined whether the incident was classified as bullying.

If the incident was classified as bullying, there were two forms of documentation. The school

social worker and intern first filled out the Bullying, Harassment, Dating and Sexual Violence

Incident Investigation Form (see Appendix B) and then the data was collected and complied in a

bullying incident table (see Appendix C). The table includes documentation involving various

items such as: date of the incident, the student who is bullying, the bully's grade level, gender

and race, the student who is being victimized, their grade level, gender and race, the type of

bullying that occurred during the incident and any consequences that resulted from the incident.

The findings provided the frequency at which the bullying behavior takes place.

Data Analysis

Findings were examined by the researcher to gain a better understanding of how

prevalent the issue of bullying is in a Providence, Rhode Island elementary school. The data was

analyzed using the table constructed during the data collection process.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

This research study sought to examine the prevalence of bullying in a Providence, Rhode

Island elementary school. Bullying incidents were documented and recorded by the school

social worker and social work intern as they occurred. The incidents were classified and

differentiated by aggressors and target students. For this research study, the 'aggressor' is

defined as the student who is committing the acts of bullying and hostility and the 'target' is

defined as the student who is falling victim to the harassment.

Over the seven month time period (August 2012– March 2013), 11 separate bullying

incidents occurred and were recorded. Of the incidents, there were 13 aggressor students and 13

target students. Of the 13 aggressors, seven were male and six were female. Of the 13 targets,

five were male and eight were female (See Table 1).

Table 1 – Aggressors and Targets by Gender

	Aggressors	Targets
Males	7	5
Females	6	8
Total	13	13

Of the 13 aggressors, three were in fifth grade, seven were in fourth grade, one was in

third grade and two were in first grade. Of the 13 targets, five were in fifth grade, six were in

fourth grade, one was in third grade and one was in first grade (See Table 2).

Table 2 – Aggressors and Targets by Grade

	Aggressors	Targets
Kindergarten	0	0
First grade	2	1
Second grade	0	0
Third grade	1	1
Fourth grade	7	6
Fifth grade	3	5
Total	13	13

The range of the aggressor's and target's races was diversely wide spread. There were

three Hispanic aggressors, two White aggressors, five Black aggressors, two Native American

and one American Indian aggressor. As for the target students, there was less diversity among

their races. Two were Hispanic, four were Black, five were White, and two were Multi Racial

(See Table 3).

Table 3 – Aggressors and Targets by Race

	Aggressors	Targets
Hispanic	3	2
White	2	5
Black	5	4
Native American	2	0
American Indian	1	0
Multi Racial	0	2
Total	13	13

Of the 11 incidents, three were verbal altercations, two were physical and the other six were both verbal and physical bullying (See Table 4).

Table 4 – Types of Altercations

	Altercation
Verbal	3
Physical	2
Verbal & Physical	6
Total	11

Of the 11 incidents, nine were same-sex bullying and two were opposite-sex bullying. All of the bullying incidents remained within their respective grades, revealing that older students were not targeting younger students or vice versa.

A majority of the bullying incidents occurred earlier in the academic school year. Five out of the nine episodes took place during the month of September, and three more occurred during October. In the months of August, December, and January there was only one incident in each month. In November and February there were no reported cases of bullying (See Table 5).

Table 5 – Bullying Incidents by Month

*Month	Bullying Incidents
August – September	1
September – October	5
October – November	3
November – December	0
December – January	1
January – February	1
February – March	0

*Note: month time frames indicate the first day of the first month, to the first day of the second month

Summary and Implications

The purpose of this study was to monitor the frequency of bullying incidents in an elementary school and to examine the demographics of each case. Each incident documented the

grade level, gender and race of the aggressor and target child, as well as, the specific type of bullying that took place. This documentation provided an over-view and revealed bullying trends within the school.

To begin, the study found that in a seven month time frame, there were eleven separate and unrelated bullying cases. Interestingly there was an even amount of aggressor students and target students but the number of male and female aggressors and targets was not evenly split.

The study revealed that more male students were aggressors than targets and more females were targets than aggressors. This finding was highly anticipated at the beginning of this study due to prior research by Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) and Wiliford et al. (2010) which supported the notion that boys are more likely than girls to commit aggressive acts. Surprisingly, not all eleven bullying incidents were same-sex bullying, but rather two of the episodes were opposite-sex bullying. Despite the fact that both cases were separate incidents from one another, the male was the aggressor and females were the target. Most interestingly, in both opposite-sex bullying cases, it was the same male student who committed the bullying.

Additionally, out of the eleven cases, eight had one aggressor and one target. In two of the other three remaining cases, there were two aggressors (in both cases, the two aggressors were female) and one target (female) and in the final remaining case, there was one bully (male) and three targets (all female).

The next factor that the study accounted for was the grade level of the aggressors and targets. Unlike the factor of the student's gender, all the episodes were same-grade bullying. The findings revealed that a majority of the bullying episodes occurred in the older grades; fourth and fifth grade. This finding was not surprising because previous research by Wiliford et

al. (2010) supports that bullying among students increases as students begin their transition from elementary school to middle school.

The third factor examined was the aggressor's and target's race. Out of the aggressors, Black and Hispanic were the most prevalent race to bully their peers and out of the targets, Black and White were the most prevalent races to be targeted. This finding was highly anticipated because the three most prominent races within the elementary school are Hispanic, Black, and White.

The intention of the study was to observe the prevalence of bullying among the students in an inner-city elementary school and examine demographic trends that may play influential roles in the amount of bullying and harassment that takes place within the school. This purpose was achieved through the findings that were collected and analyzed. The current study findings both supported and reiterated prior research findings as well as revealed new implications to the research of bullying prevalence among elementary school children.

The findings supported the initial consideration in the study, namely that bullying and harassment would be greater among the older grades and occur at the beginning of the academic year. It was anticipated that as students became older, they would try to establish social roles and dominance early on in the academic year. The finding that surprised the researcher the most was aggressor and target's race as a determining factor for bullying. The study found that bullying and victimization based on race was notably distributed among Hispanic, Black, and White students evenly. The finding stood out because most of the literature, especially findings by Craig & Pepler, 2007 and Espelage & Asidao, 2001, reveal that students of ethnic minorities are usually targets for a bully's harassment but because the school's population is very diverse

and consists of mostly students from ethnic minorities, race did not prove to be a determinant factor in the bullying episodes.

In total, the study's findings revealed that within a seven month time period, eleven separate bullying incidents occurred and 24 separate students were involved in the episodes, as aggressors and targets. Within in the target group, one male student was a repeat bully to two separate targets and out of eleven incidents only one student was both a target and a bully in two separate cases. A majority of the bullying incidents occurred at the beginning of the academic year and all cases were same-grade bullying. Although all the cases were same-grade bullying, they were not all same-sex bullying cases; two out of the eleven were opposite-sex harassment. In addition, three of the eleven incidents involved more than one bully and one aggressor. Race proved to be a less determinant factor for bullying among students.

Despite the accomplishments of the study, there were limitations. The first limitation for this study was the sample size. Due to its small sample size, its findings cannot be generalized to the larger population. In addition, the study was limited because its findings were based off of documented bullying referrals rather than student accounts of bullying incidents. Another limitation of the study that could expand its findings would be delving further into the aggressor and target's stories and determine the motives for the bullying. Through this method, the harassment episode would present more details as to why the aggressor chose the specific student as his/her target and what the side effects of being bullied did to the target student.

This study's implication on social work practice is to be a resource to inform practitioners. This study revealed that bullying is prevalent among elementary school children and they are learning at a younger age about harassment and bullying. Practitioners must be

equipped with this knowledge and the ability to diffuse bullying situations to ensure a safe and friendly learning environment for students.

This study also has implications for policy and especially procedures within schools. Knowing that bullying is prevalent in elementary schools, it is imperative for educators to implement and enforce strict policies and rules to negate the presence of bullying and harassment in the school environment

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Appendixes

Appendix C

Date	Aggressor	Grade	Race	Gender	Target	Grade	Race	Gender	Type: Verbal, physical, cyber	Consequence
8/29/12	YaWi	4	Hispanic	F	IsZa	4	Hispanic	F	V/P	Apology note signed by parent
9/7/12	ErAu	4	White	M	AmGo	4	Black	M	V	
9/19/12	ShRo	4	Black	M	JoCo	4	White	M	V/P	Lose recess/ apology note signed by parent
9/27/12	RuJa	5	Native American	M	CeEs	5	White	F	P	
9/27/12	SaSo	4	Hispanic	M	JoSa	4	Hispanic	M	V/P	
9/27/12	KeMc	3	Black	M	JuGo	3	Black	M	P	
10/22/12	JoCo	5	White	M	LuFe	5	White	M	V/P	Out-of-school suspension
10/31/12	YaVe	4	American Indian	F	StVa	4	White	F	V	
10/31/12	AsBo-Wo JaFr	1 1	Black Black	F F	MaGe	1	White	F	V/P	Out-of-school suspension/ apology note signed by parent
12/13/12	RuJa	5	Native American	M	HoGa AdBa PaBr	5 5 5	Multi Racial Black Black	F F F	V/P	
1/14/13	IsZa AdAk	4 4	Hispanic Black	F F	AlDu	4	Multi Racial	F	V	

Note: Target and aggressor names were coded to maintain confidentiality.