

# Bullying and School Climate: Examining Student and Teacher Perceptions

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## INTRODUCTION

- Recent studies within the United States have found that 8.4% (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, Scheidt, 2001) to 20% (Limber & Small, 2000) of children report being victimized several times per week, while 24.2% (Nansel et al., 2001) to 44.6% (Haynie et al., 2001) report being victimized at least once during the past year.
- School climate can be defined as the total environmental quality within a school and is multidimensional: physical ecology, social system, culture, and milieu (Anderson, 1982).
- Researchers have limited knowledge about the effects of the school setting on bullying, particularly how school climate affects victims and bullies (Ma, 2001) as well as the social and environmental factors that facilitate or inhibit bullying (Nansel et al., 2001).
- Kasen, Johnson, and Cohen (1990) found a relationship between school climate as reported by students and changes in student psychopathology. Not surprisingly, conflict in the school setting was associated with an increase of acting-out behaviors.
- The purpose of this study is to examine student and teacher perceptions of school climate and attitudes towards bullying. Specific research questions include:
  - 1) Is there a difference in perceived school climate between students and teachers? 2) Is there a difference in perceived school climate across bully/victim status? 3) Is there a difference in attitudes towards bullying between students and teachers? 4) Is there a difference in attitudes towards bullying across bully/victim status?

## PARTICIPANTS

### SCHOOL A

#### Students

- 126 (53 male and 73 female) students from School A participated in the study.
- 51 participants were in the sixth-grade, 28 participants were in the seventh-grade, and 47 participants were in the eighth-grade.
- Racial distribution for the 126 students from School A who participated was: 61% Caucasian, 7.9% African-American, 5.6% Latino(a), 7.1% Asian, 2.4% Native American, 2.4% Middle Eastern, 0.8% Eastern European, and 9.5% Biracial.

#### Teachers

- 13 (2 male and 11 female) teachers from School A participated in the study.
- Years of total teaching experience for participating teachers ranged from 3 – 34 years ( $M=15.5$ ;  $SD=9.2$ ); years of teaching at School A ranged from 1 – 13 years ( $M=6.0$ ;  $SD=3.4$ ).
- Racial distribution for the 13 teachers from School A who participated was: 92% Caucasian, and 8% Biracial.

### SCHOOL B

#### Students

- 125 (58 male and 67 female) students from School B participated in the study.
- 66 participants were in the eighth-grade, and 59 participants were in the ninth-grade.
- Racial distribution for the 125 students from School B who participated was: 92% Caucasian, 2.4% African-American, 1.6% Latino(a), 0.8% Native American, 0.8% Eastern European, and 2.4% Biracial.

#### Teachers

- 28 (10 male and 18 female) teachers from School B participated in the study.
- Years of total teaching experience for participating teachers ranged from 3 – 34 years ( $M=18.9$ ;  $SD=10.0$ ); years of teaching at School B ranged from 1 – 29 years ( $M=11.29$ ;  $SD=6.7$ ).
- Racial distribution for the 28 teachers from School B who participated was: 92.8% Caucasian, 3.6% African-American, and 3.6% Eastern European.

## PROCEDURES

- Data were collected in the Spring of 2003 from sixth-, seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade students and teachers at two different Midwestern middle schools.
- Active parental consent and youth assents were obtained for each student participant. Informed consent was obtained for all teacher participants.
- Student participants completed a series of instruments which were administered during the school day and took approximately 1 hour to complete.
- All teachers at each of the two schools were invited to participate. Teachers who consented were provided a packet of materials to complete and return to the researcher within a three-week period.
- Student participants were grouped according to status (i.e., bully, bully-victim, victim, bystander or non-involved) based on their responses on the Bully Survey (Swearer, 2001). See Table 1.

## INSTRUMENTS

### THE BULLY SURVEY – Student Version (BYS-S). (Swearer, 2001)

The Bully Survey – Student Version is a four part survey that queries students regarding their experiences with bullying, perceptions of bullying, and attitudes toward bullying. Bullying is defined in each section of the survey as: “Bullying is anything from teasing, saying mean things, or leaving someone out of a group to physical attacks (hitting, pushing, kicking) where one person or a group of people picks on another person over a long time. Bullying refers to things that happen in school but can also include things that happen on the school grounds or going to and from school.” In Part A of the survey, students answer questions about when they were victims of bullying during the past year. Part B of the survey addresses questions about the participants’ observations of bullying behavior among their peers during the past year (bystander role). Part C of the survey requests information from the participants about when they have bullied other students. Part D is a 12-item Bullying Attitudinal Scale (BAS) that measures attitudes toward bullying. Participants are asked to read each item and rate how much they believe each item to be true on a five point scale: 1 = “Totally False” to 5 = “Totally True.” Higher total scores on the BAS are considered to indicate more supportive views for bullying behavior. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .73 for the total score.

### THE BULLY SURVEY – Teacher Version (BYS-T). (Swearer, 2001)

The Bully Survey – Teacher Version is a two part survey that queries teachers regarding their observations of student bullying behaviors as well as their attitudes toward bullying. Part A of the survey addresses questions about the teachers’ observations of bullying behavior among students at their school during the past year. Part B is a 12-item Bullying Attitudinal Scale (BAS) that measures attitudes toward bullying. Participants are asked to read each item and rate how much they believe each item to be true on a five point scale: 1 = “Totally False” to 5 = “Totally True.” Higher total scores on the BAS are considered to indicate more supportive views for bullying behavior. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .26 for the total score.

### THE SOCIAL CLIMATE SCALE

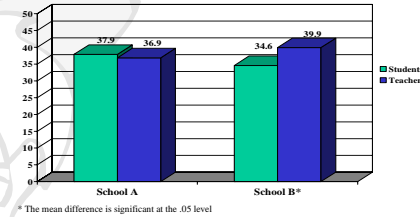
The Social Climate Scale is a thirteen-item scale with four factors: positive student and teacher interactions, negative student and teacher interactions, bullying support, and vandalism. This scale is based on a previous instrument (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990) that describes aspects of school climate hypothesized to be relevant to students’ emotional and behavioral development. Students and teachers are asked to rate each item in terms of how they think it reflects their school on a four point scale from 1 = “Totally False” to 4 = “Totally True.” Higher scores on the SCS indicate a more positive perception of the school environment. In a previous study, a factor analysis of the scale was conducted using principal axis with varimax rotation which yielded a total variance accounted for by the items to be 41%. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .71 and .37 for the total score for students and teachers respectively.

**Table 1.**  
Student Bully/Victim Status Across Schools

Status	School A	School B
Bully	10% (n=13)	10% (n=13)
Bully-Victim	21% (n=26)	22% (n=28)
Victim	25% (n=32)	26% (n=32)
Bystander	29% (n=36)	33% (n=41)
Non-involved	15% (n=19)	9% (n=11)

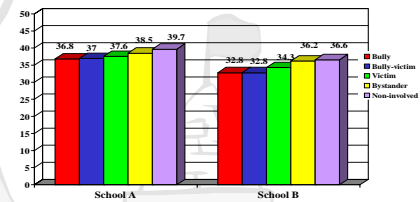
**Figure 1.**

Mean Scores for Students and Teachers on the Social Climate Scale



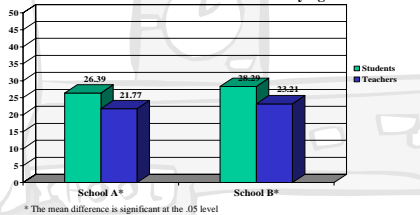
**Figure 2.**

Mean Scores across Bully/Victim Status on the Social Climate Scale



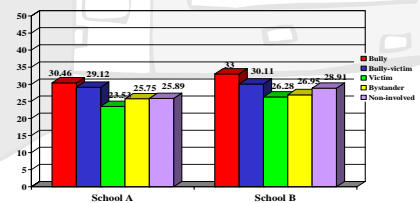
**Figure 3.**

Mean Scores for Students and Teachers on the Bullying Attitudinal Scale



**Figure 4.**

Mean Scores across Bully/Victim Status on the Bullying Attitudinal Scale



## RESULTS

- 1) Mean scores for students and teachers at School A and B on the Social Climate Scale (SCS) are presented in Figure 1.
  - An independent t-test was conducted to evaluate the relationship between students and teachers and SCS total scores.
    - o School A: the independent t-test was not significant,  $t(137) = .646$ ,  $p = .520$ .
    - o School B: the independent t-test was significant,  $t(53.78) = -5.296$ ,  $p < .000$ .
- 2) Mean scores for students across the bully/victim continuum on the SCS are presented in Figure 2.
  - A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between bully/victim status and SCS total scores.
    - o School A: the ANOVA was not significant,  $F(4, 125) = .942$ ,  $p = .442$ .
    - o School B: the ANOVA was not significant,  $F(4, 124) = 2.009$ ,  $p = .097$ .
- 3) Mean scores for students and teachers at School A and B on the Bullying Attitudinal Scale (BAS) are presented in Figure 3.
  - An independent t-test was conducted to evaluate the relationship between students and teachers and BAS total scores.
    - o School A: the independent t-test was significant,  $t(49.44) = 4.755$ ,  $p < .000$ .
    - o School B: the independent t-test was significant,  $t(100.27) = 5.554$ ,  $p < .000$ .
- 4) Mean scores for students across the bully/victim continuum on the BAS are presented in Figure 4.
  - A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between bully/victim status and BAS total scores.
    - o School A: the ANOVA was significant,  $F(4, 125) = 2.864$ ,  $p = .026$ .
    - o School B: the ANOVA was significant,  $F(4, 124) = 2.709$ ,  $p = .033$ .
  - Post hoc comparisons using Tukey’s HSD were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means.
    - o School A: no significant pairwise differences were found.
    - o School B: a significant difference in pro-bullying attitudes was found between bullies and victims.

## DISCUSSION