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Differences in Bully/Victim Problems between Early Adolescents with  
Learning Disabilities and their Non-Disabled Peers

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## Abstract

This study explored the differences of bully/victim problems between early adolescents receiving special education services under the primary category of Learning Disabilities (LD), and their non-disabled peers. Subjects involved were 54 male and female students, grades 6-8, attending a suburban middle school in Minnesota. They were administered the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). Independent samples T-tests indicated a mean difference between regular education students and students with LD educational classification in self-reported levels of being bullied, ( $p < .001$ ). In particular, the children in special education endorsed significantly more incidences of being bullied than their regular education counterparts. Moreover, the data suggested that lack of protective influences, such as liking school and number of friends, was negatively correlated with increased self-reported victimization and bullying behavior. Limitations to this study include, but are not limited to, small sample size, especially students with a special education label. This study also highlights the importance of implementing a bully prevention program in schools and outlines some bully-prevention strategies to be used in a school setting.

## Differences in Bully/Victim Problems between Early Adolescents with Learning Disabilities and their Non-Disabled Peers

This study will explore the differences of bully/victim problems between early adolescents with learning disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The authors hypothesize that children with learning disabilities will show significantly more bully/victim incidence than students without special education classification. Through use of a self-report survey, students will be categorized as bullies, victims, bully/victims (student who are victimized and bully others) or non-involved. In particular, it is hypothesized that LD children will show more victim and bully/victim problems than students in regular education. In developing the hypothesis, the authors will review literature that suggests that students categorized as victims and bully/victims have lower levels of psychosocial functioning than their peers (Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, Yu & Simons-Morton, 2001; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan & Simons-Morton, 2001, Solberg and Olweus, 2002). In addition, literature suggests that learning disabled children are especially vulnerable to risk behaviors (Kaukianinen, Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Tamminen, Make & Poskiparta, 2002; Torrance, 2000; Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992). Generally, these children exhibit weaker self-concepts, impulsivity, and social competence than their non-disabled peers (Shevlin & O'Moore, 2000). These attributes have all been shown to be correlates of bully/victim problems (Kaukianinen et al., 2002; Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992).

There are certain long-term implications of bullying that have been researched. Olweus' (1993) findings suggested that bullies did not appear to abandon their bullying tendencies as they left the school environment, but in fact carried the behaviors into their adult life. Often times they end up having a higher incidence of aggression and/or depressive tendencies extending into

adulthood in some cases (Olweus, 1993). Researchers have shown that bully victims have resulting depression, underachievement, and a belief that they deserve the abuse (Torrance, 2000). There is a marked loss of self-esteem for bully victims, which can result in socio-emotional difficulties (Olweus, 1993).

Addressing this problem is important in the field of education and psychology. Bullying is a pervasive problem in the school and intervention attempts have been found to be effective in decreasing the incidence of bullying. Also, administrators and educators are often not aware of the high incidence of bullying in their schools (Olweus, 1993). The negative influences of severe and persistent bullying and victimization have been shown to have far-reaching and long term negative maladaptive consequences (Olweus, 1993). In our concluding discussion, we will investigate protective influences and interventions, which reduce bullying and victimization, especially among students receiving special education services.

Research has shown that the prevalence of bullying and victimization among youth in the United States represents a pervasive problem in schools (Batsch & Knoff, 1994; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001). In a study conducted through the World Health Organization, approximately one out of three students in the United States, grades 6 through 10, reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001). According to the study, of those involved in bullying, 10.6% were victims of bullying, 13.0% were bullies, and 6.3% were both victims and bullies. Studies have indicated that students involved in bullying (as a victim, perpetrator, or both) have shown a variety of maladaptive psychosocial difficulties (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel, et al., 2001; Solberg & Olweus, 2002). Although many studies have been conducted outside of the United States concerning the prevalence of bullying in

schools and intervention strategies, little is known specifically about the impact of bullying in the United States (Harachi, Catalano & Hawkins, 1999; Nansel et al., 2001).

Researchers have found that the negative impact of bullying and victimization may be especially prevalent for students with special education needs (Kaukianinen et al., 2002; Torrance, 2000; Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992). Children who appear different from their peers because of their learning difficulties and social skill deficits have been shown to be subjected to repeated victimization, peer rejection, and poorer psychosocial adjustment than their mainstream peers (Kaukianinen et al., 2002). In addition, children with learning disabilities have been shown to have fewer friends and be less popular than their non-disabled peers (Geisthardt, & Munsch, 1996; Haager, & Vaughan, 1995).

In order to elucidate on these bully/victim problems, the authors will establish a definition of bullying and give characteristics of bullies, victims, bully/victims, as well as gender differences. In addition, this paper will provide characteristics of learning disabled (LD) students and their relation to bullying and victimization. Other matters relevant to the purpose, as well as the reason behind the study will be discussed as well.

### *Definition of bullying*

Bullying has been defined as a form of aggression that comprises three basic factors: (1) the intention of the behavior is to harm or disturb another, (2) the negative acts are repeated over time, and (3) an imbalance of power exists between the aggressor and the victim (Nansel, et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). The “negative act” may take the form of verbal harassment (name calling, taunting, and threatening), physical actions (pushing, kicking, and pinching), or nonverbal contact (making faces and purposeful exclusion from a peer group). Olweus stressed that an imbalance of strength must exist between the perpetrator and victim. According to Olweus, the

victim has difficulty defending him or herself and is generally helpless when harassed by more powerful students.

### *Characteristics of victims*

Solberg and Olweus (2002) found through use of self-report that victims showed markedly higher levels of internalizing symptoms, such as social disintegration, global negative self-evaluation, and depressive tendencies than non-victims. Victims of bullying or “passive victims” have been shown to be generally physically weaker, have few friends, and exhibit more depression and anxiety (Olweus, 1993). In addition, Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988) found that a child’s level of victimization was negatively correlated with peer acceptance and peer rejection. As targets of repeated harassment, Olweus theorized that negative evaluations of themselves, insecurity, and anxiety were compounded through repeated harassment or bullying. Nansel et al., (2001) found that youth who lack social skills and were socially isolated were the primary targets of bullying because of their perceived weakness, inability to defend themselves, and lack of a supportive peer network of protective friends.

### *Characteristics of bullies*

Children who bully have been found to exhibit significantly higher levels of both physical and non-physical aggression and antisocial behavior (Solberg & Olweus, 2002). Studies have indicated higher rates of problem behaviors such as a negative perception of the school climate and higher rates of drinking and smoking (Nansel, 2001). Unlike victims, researchers have shown that those who bully made friends with greater ease and had a larger peer group (Nansel, 2001). As compared to non-involved peers, bullies typically score higher on measures of externalizing behaviors, such as hyperactivity and impulsivity (Kaukianinen et al., 2002). Pelligrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) theorized that bullies use aggression instrumentally

to assert dominance and maintain leadership within aggressive cliques. These authors also believe that the bullying behavior is calculated and serves this social function. In turn, Olweus (1993) summarized in his research that bullies likely show less empathy for students who were victimized by bullying behaviors. In summary, these maladjustments may have a long-term negative impact carrying into adulthood. In a longitudinal study, Olweus (1993) reported that bullies were more likely to be convicted of crimes as adults and have serious criminal records in the future.

### *Characteristics of bully/victims*

Students who are the targets of bullying and bully others have been referred to by researchers as “bully/victims” (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2002). As compared to bullies and victims, Haynie et al. (2001) and Nansel et al. (2002) found that bully/victims displayed the poorest pattern of maladaptive characteristics, especially in early adolescence. According to Haynie et al. (2001), these children represented “a particular high-risk group, characterized by higher rates of problem behaviors and depressive symptoms, lower self-control and social competence, and poorer school functioning” (p. 44). Specifically, they have been shown to score higher on measures of both externalizing (verbal and physical aggression) and internalizing (low self-esteem, depressive symptoms) behavior (Solberg & Olweus, 2002). Olweus (1993) has defined children who bully and who are subjected to bullying as “provocative victims.” Olweus theorized that these children were both aggressively reactive and anxious. In common terms, they may be characterized as the students who provoke fights and engage in disruptive behavior. Pelligrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) defined these students as “aggressive victims” because they tended to impulsively and aggressively react in retaliatory circumstances. Unlike bullies, the aggression does not function in a calculated or instrumental manner (Pelligrini et al., 1999).

*Bullying in early adolescence*

Bullying problems have been shown to be especially acute and severe in early adolescence (Pelligrini et al., 1999; Hoover, Oliver & Hazler, 1992). The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2002) found that 6<sup>th</sup> graders were seven times more likely to report bullying than 12<sup>th</sup> graders. According to Hoover and his colleagues (1992), early adolescence (typically 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade) represented a time of numerous and rapid changes, both physical and emotional. During middle school, Hoover and his colleagues theorized that adolescents often utilized public aggressive displays to assert dominance within the peer group by targeting students who were physically weaker or socially isolated.

*Learning disability characteristics*

Although students with learning disabilities (LD) are generally a heterogeneous group, certain characteristics have been found to be common among them. Students with learning disabilities often experienced problems with social competence (Haager & Vaughan, 1995). As rated by their teachers, learning disabled students demonstrated poorer social skills and more behavior problems than their peers. Learning disabled students were also found to be less cooperative than their non-disabled classmates (Haager & Vaughan, 1995).

Overall, students' perceptions of their learning disabled peers tended to be negative. Students who were learning disabled appeared to be less popular, and less well-liked than their peers. Haager and Vaughan (1995) found that students with learning disabilities were significantly less well-known by their classmates. When asked, "How well do you like this student?" students rated their learning disabled peers significantly lower than their other classmates. In another study, students with learning disabilities named significantly fewer school age friends as people that they went to when needing social support when facing stressful events



(Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996). Having fewer friends to turn to, learning disabled students tended to have a weak social support system, and lacked social connections to peers. It had also been found that adolescents with learning disabilities relied on cognitive avoidance as a coping strategy more often than their peers (Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996). Students with learning disabilities have also been found to have poorer self concepts than their non-disabled peers (Kaukiainen et al., 2002).

Students with learning disabilities frequently have difficulties with attention and hyperactivity. This is highlighted by the high incidence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among LD students. Mayes, Calhoun & Crowell, (2000) found that 82.2% of learning disabled students were also diagnosed with ADHD. In addition, it was found that students with learning disabilities that did not have an ADHD diagnosis had significantly more attention problems than students without LD. Parents of students with LD rated them as having more problems with hyperactivity than their peers (Mayes, Calhoun & Crowell, 2000).

#### *Learning disabled as bully/victims and victims*

Kaukiainen et al. (2002) stated that learning disabled students may fit a pattern of bully/victims as described previously. Learning disabled students, by definition had poorer school functioning, which is one characteristic of bully/victims (Haynie et al., 2001). Also, low levels of social competence have been found to be a characteristic of learning disabled students (Kaukiainen, 2002). Haager and Vaughan (1995) reported higher rates problem behaviors and poorer social competence in learning disabled students which is also a characteristic of bully/victims (Haynie et al., 2001). High rates of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in students with learning disorders have been found (Mayes, Calhoun & Crowell, 2000). Similarly, bully/victims have been shown to have impulsive tendencies (Pelligrini et al., 1999).

Learning disabled students have been shown to be less popular than their peers (Haager and Vaughan, 1995). Similarly, victims have been shown to have fewer friends than their peers (Olweus, 1993). According to Shevlin and O'Moore, often times students with disabilities did not feel like they were a part of their school. They felt separated from their peers because they went to different classrooms and needed special help from teachers (Shevlin & O'Moore, 2000). This can set up a formula that makes students with disabilities more susceptible to bullying.

The purpose of this study is to compare the incidence of bullies, victims, and bully/victims among learning disabled students and their non-disabled peers. The following research questions were formulated:

1. Are there significant differences in victim and bully/victim problems between learning disabled students and their non-disabled peers?
2. Are there significant differences in empathy between boys and girls?
3. Does number of friends have a significant effect on level of bullying?
4. Are there significant differences in school dissatisfaction between victims and non-victims?
5. Does number of friends correlate with liking school across all students?
6. Are there significant differences in empathy between bullies and victims?

## Method

### *Participants*

The subjects were sixth through eighth grade students from a public middle school in a suburban school district in Minnesota. There were 16 sixth graders, 26 seventh graders and 12 eighth graders in the sample. As a school, 6.3% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunches, 13.5% were in special education, 88 % were White, 4% were Black, 3% were

Hispanic and less than one percent were American Indian (Minnesota Department of Education: School Report Card, 2004). The sample size included a total of 54 participants: 50 were regular education students and four were students with learning disabilities. Permission forms were sent to families in the target school whose children were in regular track classes or in special education with a label of specific learning disability. All students identified as having a learning disability had received special educational services. The criteria used to determine learning disability was based on the Minnesota model. The criteria included: a severe discrepancy (of at least two standard deviations) between the students cognitive functioning and academic achievement, severe academic underachievement and an information processing deficit.

### *Materials*

*Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire* (Olweus, 1996). Dan Olweus created the questionnaire to be used in schools as a first step in creating and implementing a school bullying intervention program. The questionnaire is a student self-report survey in a Likert format that questions the child about their experiences with bully and victim situations. The survey provides frequency data in relation to the number of times a student recalls being bullied or bullying in “last couple of months” (Solberg & Olweus, 2002). A definition of bullying and victims is read aloud to those taking the survey to ensure that everyone is operating from the same knowledge base (Olweus, 1996). Refer to the survey in Appendix A for the definition and a copy of the Questionnaire.

Following the definitions are two *global* questions: “How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?” and “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?” The response alternatives to the two global survey items provide specific frequency choices: “I haven’t been bullied/bullied other students

at school in the past couple of months”, “only once or twice”, “2 or 3 times a month”, “about once a week”, and “several times a week”

Solberg and Olweus (2002) provided reliability and validity data for both the short and a long form for the questionnaires. The short form consists of the two global questions, whereas the long form follows the two global questions by 10 more specific questions that assessed the varying forms of bullying behaviors, such as indirect (e.g. spreading rumors) and direct (e.g. name-calling). For the purpose of this study, the short form of the questionnaire was utilized because it’s brevity, utility, and sufficient statistical properties. For both the short and the long forms, a cutoff point for the survey exists if a student reports that he or she has been bullied or bullied “2 or 3 or more times a month.” From this frequency data, students can be classified as non-involved, bullies, or bully/victims. Solberg and Olweus (2002) found this cutoff point sufficient to discriminate between non-involved students and students involved in bullying behavior based on differences in psychosocial functioning which matched a pattern of maladaptive characteristics based on the dichotomized global measures (a measure of discriminate validity). For instance, students who bullied others 2 or 3 or more times a month showed higher aggression and other antisocial behaviors than students who did not respond with this level of severity of bullying behaviors.

In addition to attesting to the discriminate validity of the global measures, Solberg and Olweus found a high degree of correlation between the dichotomized global questions and the specific questions (.79 for being bullies and .77 for bullying others). Based on the Spearman-Brown formula, the researchers found “reliability” estimates between the two questions and the specific questions were .88 for being bullied and .87 for bullying others. In summary, Solberg and Olweus attested to the functionality of the two key variables both in terms of reliability and

construct validity. However, the authors cautioned that future research would have greater reliability if indices were composed of the averages the global and specific questions, and not solely based on the dichotomized variables. The psychometric properties listed above were calculated based on the long form of the Olweus questionnaire, while a shortened form of the questionnaire was used in the current study.

*Protective Influences.* In order to identify some protective influences associated with less bullying behaviors, the survey asked to students the following questions: “How do you like school”; and “How many good friends do you have in your class (es)?” In addition, a question measures the perception of how willing other students would be to intercede given a bullying act. (“How often do other students try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?”). These questions and responses choices were taken from the *Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire*. Please refer to Appendix A for details of answer choices.

*Empathy.* The following question was utilized from the *Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire* in order to identify the degree which students think or feel about witnessing a bullying act: “When you see a student your age being bullied at school, what do you feel or think?” The student may the choose from (a) “This is probably what he or she deserves”; (b) “I don’t feel much”; (c) “I feel a bit sorry for him or her”; or (d) “I feel sorry for him or her and want to help him or her.”

#### *Procedure*

Middle school staff handed out parent permission forms, which were sent home with 574 students. Both student and parent signatures were required for participation in the study. Parents and students were informed of the anonymous nature of the study and given detailed contact information consisting of director of the University of Wisconsin – River Fall Independent

Research Review Board, the researcher's university supervisor, and the researchers themselves. Student permission was obtained on the day the administration.

The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire was administered to students who had returned signed permission forms during their activity periods. The activity room teachers were given a complete set of instructions for administering the questionnaire (Appendix B). A special education teacher provided a list of students with primary Learning Disability (LD) classifications and submitted the list as well as the correct amount of coded questionnaires (described below) to the activity room teachers. The researchers did not have access to the special education list and had no knowledge of any identifying student information. The researchers were present in the building to supervise the procedure act as consultants to ensure standardized administration.

The activity room teachers distributed the coded questionnaires in a discrete manner. There were two different sets of surveys with a code in the lower right hand corner of the first page (XXXOOO and XXXXXX). Teachers were instructed to hand out the (XXXXXX) surveys to the students that have been identified with a special education label of LD. The rest of the students received the survey coded (XXXOOO). The teachers placed the (XXXXXX) surveys on the bottom of their stack and handed them "from the bottom of the deck" to students with the LD label.

The researchers adhered to standardization in that all students were given the same instructions as stated in the accompanying materials of the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Junior form) (Olweus, 1996). The administrators read aloud the definition of bullying and victims to those taking the survey to ensure that everyone was operating from the same knowledge base. Verbal instructions emphasized the importance of giving truthful and

accurate responses, and that their answers were completely anonymous and confidential.

Students were instructed to not write their names on the questionnaire or demographic form. The only place the student wrote their name was on the permission forms, which were collected and stored separately from the questionnaires and demographic forms. Upon completion, students placed their surveys in an envelope, which was sealed and given to the researchers immediately after the activity room period.

### Results

The frequency data is based on a sample of 54 students, 31 females and 23 males, in grades 6, 7, and 8. The sample is comprised of four students with a special education label of LD; fifty students were in regular education. The analysis showed that 20.3% of all the students reported moderate to severe incidences of being bullied in approximately the past two months (two-three to several times). In terms of bullying others, 44% of all the students reported taking part in bullying another student at least once or more in the past two months. Additionally, 5.5% of students reported bullying others once per week or more. Over half of the students (55.6%) reported being bullied at least once or twice. When it comes to bullying, no students were identified as bullies, eight (14.8%) students were identified as victims, while three (5.8%) were identified as bully/victims. Students were categorized as bullies if they identified as having bullied two or three times a month or more. They were identified as victims if reported being bullied two or three times a month or more, and bully/victims if they were categorized as both bullies and victims. See Table 1 for additional frequency data and Table 3 for additional prevalence data.

Table 1

## Frequency Data for All Subjects

	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
			(n = 54)	
More Friends	3.72	1.04	-.36	-.54
Like School	3.54	.86	-.39	.41
Stop bullying	2.13	.89	.24	-.82
Empathy	3.20	.76	-.63	-.11
Victim	1.96	1.21	1.46	1.41
Bully	1.57	.84	2.16	5.87

Approximately 28% of students in the total sample indicated that they believe others do not try to stop bullying when they see it occur between students. Approximately 17% of students reported that they do not feel much when they see bullying, or the victims of bullying probably deserve it. While the other 83% report feeling sorry or want to help victims

Within the total sample, liking school showed a positive and moderate correlation with several other factors including: having a greater number of friends ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the belief that others will help stop bullying when they see it ( $r = .448$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and empathizing with victims of bullying ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) based on correlational analysis. In other words, students who like school are more likely to have more friends, and empathize with victims of bullying. Students who like school are also more likely to feel that others will help students when they are bullied.

Students who reported having more friends showed a tendency to be less likely to bully other students. Statistically, this was a moderate correlation ( $r = -.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Students who



Table 2

Intercorrelations Between Subscales for All Students

Subscales	More Friends	Like School	Stop Bullying	Empathy	Victim	Bully
			(n = 54)			
More Friends	-	.36**	.24*	.19	-.23*	-.34**
Like School	-	-	.45***	.43***	-.22	-.24
Stop bullying	-	-	-	.13	-.19	-.13
Empathy	-	-	-	-	-.32	-.54
Victim	-	-	-	-	-	.48***
Bully	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

reported having more friends showed a tendency to be less victimized by bullying ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This was a statistically significant, albeit, weak correlation. See Table 2 for more correlational data reported having more friends showed a tendency to be less victimized by bullying ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This was a statistically significant, albeit, weak correlation. See Table 2 for more correlational data.

Being bullied was moderately and positively correlated with bullying others ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A moderate negative correlation existed between victims and empathy ( $r = -.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Children who are bullied by others tended to have less empathy. See Table 2 for additional correlational data.

In addition to the descriptive statistics just described, several additional comparisons of participant subs-samples were conducted. A two-tailed independent sample T-test indicated a mean difference between regular education students and students with LD educational classification in self-reported levels of being bullied, ( $t = -4.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In particular, the children in special education endorsed significantly more incidences of being bullied than

Table 3

## Prevalence of Bullying and Being Bullied by Educational Classification

	Never		1-2 Times		3 or More Times	
	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage
<u>Bullying</u>						
Overall	30	55.6	21	38.9	3	5.6
LD	3	75	0	0	1	25
Regular Ed	27	54	21	42	2	4
<u>Victimization</u>						
Overall	24	44.4	19	35.2	6	11.4
LD	0	0	1	25	3	75
Regular Ed	24	48	18	36	8	16

their regular education counterparts. To determine the effect size or amount of variance explained, a point biserial correlation method was calculated. Based on this analysis, 29% of being bullied was explained by educational status. Although the difference was considered highly significant, only four children made up the LD sample compared to the fifty students who comprised the regular education sample. See Table 3 for additional prevalence data.

Additionally, a two-tailed independent sample T-test indicated that male and female students differed significantly in their degree of empathy towards victims of bullying ( $t = 2.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with females being more empathetic. Eight percent of this difference in empathy was explained by gender based on the point biserial correlation method.

### Discussion

Bullying continues to be a major concern in our schools. One out of five students surveyed reported moderate to severe bullying. Overall nearly 6% of our sample of 54 students was categorized as bully/victims and nearly 15% were categorized as victims. These findings are comparable to other studies, which found 10.6% of a sample to be victims and 6.3% to be bully/victims (Nansel, et al., 2001). In this study, zero students were categorized as bullies, in

comparison to another study (Nansel, et al., 2001), which found 13% of students categorized as bullies.

Reasons for the low level of reporting in the current study could be related to students feeling self-conscious about reporting bullying actions on surveys administered by their teachers. Additionally students may have guilty feelings associated with their actions or they could not be aware that their actions qualify as bullying (i.e., think they are just teasing fellow classmates). Olweus (1996) suggested that personnel separate from teachers and administrators deliver the survey in an environment outside of the student's classroom and to the entire student population. This procedure helps reduce the likelihood of a student altering his or her responses because of perceived pressure to answer in a more positive light under the eyes of an "authority" figure or teacher.

The current study was also limited due to a lack of participation among students overall and especially students with learning disabilities. Out of the 54 students surveyed, only four students made up the learning disabilities group, making between-group comparisons difficult to validate. However, combined with past research (Kaukianinen, et al., 2002; Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992), the current study indicates that the LD population is likely more victimized by bullying than regular education students.

In addition to enlisting more subjects and having outside survey administrators, future research may utilize the long form versus the short form of the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). As mentioned previously, although Solberg and Olweus (2002) attested to functionality of the two key variables, they argued that future research would have greater reliability if indices were created based on an average of the global and specific questions for both bully and victim categories. This research team had several difficulties obtaining the

permission of school administrators to conduct an expanded survey due to time limitations.

Future researchers would likely have increased success if the survey were administered as part of a school wide program with a focus on reducing and eliminating bullying in their schools. In addition to providing valuable frequency data about the prevalence of bullying in the school, the survey would provide information regarding protective influences that reduce bullying.

Several protective influences were identified in the current study. Overall, students who reported having more friends were less often victims of bullying. Additionally, students who like school more reported less victimization. These two factors seem to be interrelated. Strong social networks may provide adolescents with built in protection against bullies. Bullies may often target victims who are alone. Those students who have been bullied are less likely to look forward to coming to school, and are therefore less likely to report liking school. The consequences of this victimization have long-term negative implications (Olweus, 1993).

Based on the results of the current study, approximately 20% of the students surveyed were categorized as victims or bully/victims, which were defined by reporting having been bullied 2-3 times a month or more. According to Olweus (1993), children who are repeatedly bullied may show more signs of depression, under-achievement, and low self-esteem than students who have not been bullied. These negative results of bullying can cause long-term social emotional difficulties. A zero tolerance approach to bullying is not enough to address the high prevalence of bullying occurring in schools today. Interventions need to be aimed at counteracting the effects that bullying has on its victims.

Results of the current study have several implications towards implementing bully-prevention programming in schools. The Olweus survey used is a viable way to begin to see the extent to which bullying incidents are affecting students in school. Valuable information from

the student standpoint as to which students are being targeted, how students view bullying, and what factors may protect students against being bullied can be obtained using this survey.

When developing a bully prevention plan, in addition to obtaining student input, it is also imperative to gain insight from teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. If multiple people are able to take part in the process of assessing the problem, they will be more likely to buy into working with a program created to eliminating bullying.

Parents, students, and school personnel must make a commitment to the process. They will need to confront old adages (boys will be boys) and traditional attitudes on bullying (it is normal for kids of a certain age) because bullying can and does negatively affect a child's life based on their childhood bullying experiences. After a bullying plan is implemented, follow up surveys are important to monitor if the bullying interventions had any effect. Bullying is a serious problem that is often and easily ignored, but needs to be addressed in all schools.

An effective bullying program should include social skill groups to boost social competencies among students weak in this area. The current study showed that students who had a stronger social network were better protected against bullying. Schools can help students build their network of friends by teaching friendship making and social skills.

Given the consistency of the current findings and previous research students with the LD classification are at greater risk to be victims of bullying. Therefore, another aspect that could be addressed in bully prevention would be to educate the school population on special education labels to dispel myths. This would help to create awareness, understanding, and empathy towards students with disabilities. Teachers could use activities that show regular education students what its like to have a disability.

A third piece that can be included in a bully prevention program is teaching students to identify bullying when they see it, and giving them strategies to use to deal with bullying. This will empower students by showing them how to actively take part in eliminating bullying.

The current study found that females were significantly more empathetic to victims of bullying than their male peers. This finding implicates that bully prevention programs should include teaching empathy to all students paying particular attention to males in their dissemination of the information.

Throughout the process, parents and community members should be encouraged to participate by giving lessons, or leading small or large group discussions. The more people that you can get to commit to the process, the more successful the outcomes will be. Although the current study has limitations, even its limited view yields information supporting the need to address bullying in schools across all ages and locations.

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## Appendix A

Olweus Bullying Survey completed by students.

Grade (Circle one):    6                    7                    8

1. How do you like school?

- I dislike school very much
- I like school
- I dislike school
- I like school very much
- I neither like or dislike school

2. Are you a boy or a girl?

- girl     boy

3. How many good friends do you have in your class(es)?

- none
- I have 1 good friend in my class(es)
- I have 2 or 3 good friends in my class(es)
- I have 4 or 5 good friends in my class(es)
- I have 6 or more good friends in my class(es)

#### About Being Bullied By Other Students

Here are some questions about being bullied by other students. First we define or explain the word “bullying”. We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students

- say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
- completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose.
- hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room.
- tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her.
- and other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way.

But we don't call it bullying when the teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about equal strength or power argue or fight.

## About being Bullied

4. How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?
- I haven't been bullied at school in the past couple of months
  - it has only happened once or twice
  - 2 or 3 times a month
  - about once a week
  - several times a week

## About Bullying Other Students

5. How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school the past couple of months?
- I haven't bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months
  - it has happened once or twice
  - 2 or 3 times a month
  - about once a week
  - several times a week
6. How often do other students try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
- Almost Never
  - once in a while
  - sometimes
  - often
  - almost always
7. When you see a student your age being bullied at school, what do you feel or think?
- This is probably what he or she deserves
  - I don't feel much
  - I feel a bit sorry for him or her
  - I feel sorry for him or her and want to help him or her

## Appendix B

Instructions for teachers to administer the survey.

You will receive 2 different sets of surveys with a code in the lower right hand corner of the first page (XXXOOO and XXXXXX). Please hand out the (XXXXXX) surveys to the students that have been identified with a special education label of Learning Disabled and/or Emotionally Behaviorally Disabled. The rest of the students should receive the survey coded (XXXOOO). Please be very discrete in handing out the surveys to the students with the special education label. We suggest that you place the (XXXXXX) surveys on the bottom of your stack and hand them “from the bottom of the deck.” It is critical for our research that the students identified receive the (XXXXXX) survey.

Make sure that the students sit as far apart from each other as possible so that they can not see how others respond. It is also important to put an immediate stop to kidding or commotion. In such cases, the students should be encouraged to take the matter seriously and to answer the questions honestly and properly.

Please do not walk around the classroom because students may think you are trying to see what they have answered.

Please follow these instruction in the order presented.

1). Before handing out the survey:

Tell the students that the purpose of the survey is to gather information from the students about bullying in order to make the school a safer environment.

Please instruct your students not to answer any of the questions until you have read the instructions.

2). Hand out the survey and then read the following instructions verbatim.

“You will find questions in this booklet about your life in school. There are several answers next to each question. Each answer has a box in front of it. Answer the first question by making an “X” next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school. If you really dislike school, mark an X in the box next to “I dislike school very much”. If you really like school, put an X in the box next to “I like school very much”, and so on. Only mark one of the boxes. Try to keep the mark inside of the box. Now put an X in the box next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school.”

“If you mark the wrong box you can change your answer: make the wrong box completely black. Then put an X in the box where you want your answer to be. Don’t put your name on this booklet. No one will know how you have answered these questions. But it is important that you answer carefully and how you really feel. Sometimes it is hard to decide what to answer. Then just answer how you think it is. If you have questions, raise your hand.”

“Most of the questions are about your life in school in the past couple of months, that is. The period from start of school after Christmas vacation until now. So when you answer, you should think of how it has been during the past 2 or 3 months and not only how it is just now.”

“Now go ahead and answer the next two questions. Has everyone answered the question #2 and #3? Does everyone understand what to do?”

3). Read the definition “About being bullied by other students” aloud (other side of this instruction sheet). Be prepared for questions. Tell the students to place the surveys in the envelop when they are finished. (Please have the students place surveys in the envelop in an area of the room that is not in front of you).

The students may complete the 2 questions on the back side of the page.

4). After your students have completed the surveys, seal the envelope in front of the class and ask a trustworthy student to hand into the front office. Thanks for participating.

#### About Being Bullied By Other Students

Here are some questions about being bullied by other students. First we define or explain the word “bullying”. We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students:

- say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
- completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose.
- hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room.
- tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her.
- and other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way.

But we don't call it bullying when the teasing is done in a friendly and playful way.

Also, it is not bullying when two students of about equal strength or power argue or fight. Does everyone understand what is meant by bullying? Please turn the page and answer the questions.”

If there are questions or comments about the meaning of the word “bullying,” you can elaborate and provide illustrative examples. It is important that you have a good understanding of the specified definition, which builds on three criteria. Bullying means:

- 1) negative, mean behavior that
- 2) occurs repeatedly (usually over a certain period of time)
- 3) in a relationship that is characterized by an imbalance of power or strength (the person who is bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself.)

It may be particularly difficult for the students to differentiate between teasing that is relatively friendly and benign (not bullying) and mean and hurtful teasing (bullying).

