

School Climate, Victimization and Anxiety in Male High School Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Bullying is a negative social interaction that negatively impacts school experiences.
- Prevalence rates have estimated that 29.9% of students are involved in bullying as either a bully, victim, or a bully-victim (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simmons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001).
- While research has examined prevalence rates for bullies, victims, and bully-victims, less has been reported regarding rates for individuals that indirectly experience bullying, or bystanders.
- Research conducted by Craig (1995) indicates a large number of children and adolescents observe bullying, with bystanders being present in 85% of bullying interactions.
- The examination of bullying in schools has identified a relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and victimization. Oliver, Hoover and Hazler (1994) found that students who believe their school had a positive school climate reported a lower frequency of bullying than those who reported a negative climate.
- A study conducted by Espelage and Holt (2001) found that 20% of victims scored within the clinical range on a standard measure of anxiety. Research by Swearer et al. (2001) further elucidated the relationship between anxiety and bullying, finding that victims were more likely to experience anxious symptoms than students not involved in bullying.
- However, research thus far has yet to analyze the relationship between bullying, anxiety and perceptions of school climate.
- This study examined whether the variable of anxiety mediated the relationship between perception of school climate and direct or observed victimization. It is hypothesized that when anxiety is accounted for, the relationship between victimization and negative perceptions of school climate will be attenuated.

PARTICIPANTS

- 145 male students participated in the study, ranging in age from 14-17, with a mean age of 15.7.
- Racial distribution of the students in the study is as follows: 89.7% Caucasian, 5.5% Latino, 2.1% African American, 1.4% Asian, .7% Biracial, and .7% identifying as "other."
- The sample consisted of 49 victims (33.8%), 53 bystanders (36.6%), and 43 students not involved in bullying (29.7%).

PROCEDURES

- Data were collected in the Spring of 2005 from 9th, 10th and 11th graders at an all-male Catholic High School in the Midwest.
- Active parental consent and youth assent were obtained for each student participant.

PROCEDURES, continued

- Student participants completed a series of instruments which were administered during the school day and took approximately 1 hour to complete.
- Student participants were grouped according to status (i.e., victim, bystander or not involved) based upon their responses on the Bully Survey (Swearer, 2001).

MEASURES

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 as: "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, 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). Part C requests information from the participants about when they have bullied other students. If students do not complete sections A, B or C, they are classified as "not involved in bullying."

Multidimensional Scale for Children (MASC, March, 1997)
This instrument is a self-report checklist assessing major dimensions of anxiety in children ages 8 to 19. The MASC consists of 39 items and covers 4 basic scales (Physical Symptoms, Harm Avoidance, Social Anxiety, and Separation/Panic), when combined create a scale measuring Total Anxiety. Individuals are asked to rate the severity of each item based upon a four-point Likert scale. T-scores greater than 65 differentiate youth with an anxiety disorder diagnosis from youth without an anxiety disorder diagnosis (March, 1997). The MASC has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability for all main factors and subfactors, including a total score coefficient alpha of .90 (March, Parker, Sullivan, Stallings, & Conners, 1997). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .91.

Thoughts About School (TAS, Swearer & Song, 1999)
This instrument 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." In the present study, the internal consistency reliability using coefficient alpha was .75 for the total score.

RESULTS

Figure 1 Mean Scores of Anxiety and Perception of School Climate Across Status

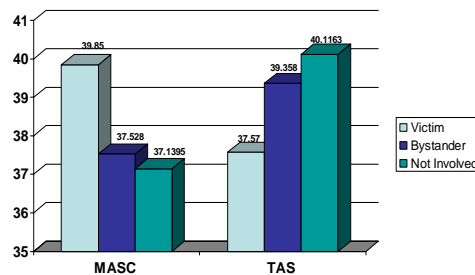


Figure 2 Direct Path Analysis

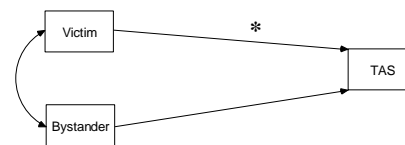
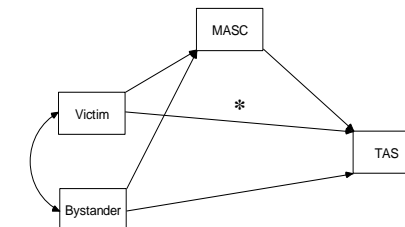


Figure 3 Mediation Path Analysis



RESULTS, continued

- Mean scores for anxiety (MASC) and perceptions of school climate (TAS) for victims, bystanders and students not involved in bullying is presented in Figure 1.
- Victims reported the highest levels of anxiety (39.85), followed by bystanders (37.528) and students not involved in bullying (37.1395).
- Victims reported more negative perceptions of school climate (37.57), followed by bystanders (39.358) and students not involved in bullying (40.1163).
- A one-way analysis of variance indicated a significant difference between status and perception of school climate $F(2, 142)=3.083, p>.05$.
- Path analyses (MPLUS, see Figures 2 and 3) indicate a significant direct relationship between perceptions of school climate and direct victimization (indicated by an asterisk in Figure 2). Wald statistic Z score=-2.328; $p>.05$.
- When utilizing anxiety as a mediator variable, path analyses also indicate a significant relationship between perceptions of school climate and direct victimization. Wald statistic Z score=-2.328; $p>.05$.

DISCUSSION

- In this sample, neither victims nor bystanders reported significantly higher anxiety than students not involved in bullying. This finding is contrary to previous studies analyzing anxiety and victimization (Baldry, 2004; Bond et al., 2001; Espelage & Holt, 2001; Storch, Brassard & Masia-Warner, 2003; Swearer et al., 2001).
- These findings may be the result of the sample utilized in this study, as few (if any) current studies have been conducted with a sample drawn from an all male private religious school.
- As both victims and bystanders did not report significantly higher anxiety than students not involved in bullying, path analyses indicated that anxiety is not a mediating variable between victimization and perceptions of school climate. That is, when anxiety is accounted for, victims' perceptions of school climate is still more negative than students not involved in bullying.
- While victims reported significantly lower perceptions of school climate than students not involved, bystanders did not.

LIMITATIONS

- The measures used in this study were self-report. While research has illustrated the accuracy of this method, common method variance may impact the results. Future research utilizing multiple informants such as parents and/or teachers might further explicate the findings of this study.
- Future studies should include a larger sample in attempt to decrease the standard error.
- Bullies and bully-victims (students who are both a bully and a victim) should be included in future analysis of perceptions of school climate and anxiety.