




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Category/Theme: Context and Prevention

A Multilevel Perspective on Peer Victimization: Discrepancies among Youth, Teacher, and Parent Views

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Given the high prevalence and significant social-emotional and behavioral impacts of involvement in bullying, there is growing interest in potential strategies to prevent bullying and peer victimization. In order for school-based prevention programs to be effective, considerable coordination and involvement is needed among all members of the school community, including students, teachers, and parents (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006). While many bullying prevention programs aim to involve these multiple partners, few studies have examined the perceptual differences among students, teachers, and parents with regard to peer victimization and the broader climate of bullying. It is critical that we better understand how school climate and bullying are perceived by students, parents, and teachers, and the potential influence of school contextual factors on those perceptions.

This project used data collected from 11,733 students, 1,029 school staff, and 967 parents, from 31 elementary, 9 middle, and 5 high schools to compare students', staff members', and parents' perceptions of the bullying climate at their school. Multilevel analyses were conducted to examine perceptions of types of victimization most commonly experienced by students, norms regarding bullying, as well as school climate variables (e.g., safety, witnessing bullying) in conjunction with school-level indicators of disorder.

Analyses indicated that parents were 8 times more likely to rate the school as safe as compared to the students (OR = 8.77, $p < .001$), whereas teachers were 12.5 times more likely than the students to rate the school as safe. Parents grossly underestimated the students' exposure to bullying as a witness (OR = 0.23, $p < .001$). There were also several significant differences in student, parent, and teacher perceptions of the school climate by grade level. Teachers and parents underestimated the extent to which students perceived bullies as popular (OR_{teacher} = 0.35, $p < .001$; OR_{parents} = 0.24, $p < .001$). Teachers were 23% less likely than students to view bullies as feared. Additional results for other outcomes (e.g., forms of victimization, belonging) and the influence of the school contextual factors (e.g., school size, student mobility, rate of bullying) will be reported.

These findings suggest that there are several discrepancies between staff, parents, and students with regard to their perceptions of the bullying climate. Students may be particularly vulnerable in schools where parents and teachers underestimate the students' safety and norms regarding bullying. A discussion surrounding the importance of student, parent, and teacher perceptions of the school climate and implications of this research for prevention and intervention will be presented.

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