




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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ID# 520

Location: Pikes Peak (Atrium Tower/2nd Floor)

Time of Presentation: Jun 04 2:45 PM - 4:15 PM

Category/Theme: Etiology

The Role of Parents in Preventing School Bullying

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A growing number of studies highlight the important role parents can play in preventing school violence and peer victimization. When it comes to being the victim of bullying, some researchers suggest that victims' parents should notify the school and work collaboratively with the school to prevent further victimization (Espelage, & Swearer, 2004). However, there may be contextual aspects of the school which influence parents' decision to contact the school for help or handle the situation on their own.

The current study used latent variable structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the association between school context and parents' responses to their child's victimization. Data for this study come from 773 parents of victimized students (grades 4-12) enrolled in 98 schools.

The SEM model included 3 latent variables representing parents' perceptions of the school context (school climate, prevention efforts, engagement), and their influence on the parent response variables (e.g., contact the school counselor, ignore/do nothing, talk to the bully). The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(25, 773) = 53.5$; TLI = .98; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04. The results indicated that a higher score on school climate was negatively associated with contacting the teacher ($\beta = -.71$, $p < .008$) and the school administrator ($\beta = -.84$, $p < .001$), which suggests that the poorer parents perceive the climate, the more likely parents are to contact the school. Interestingly, the schools' prevention efforts were negatively associated with parents opting to talk to their child ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$), such that if parents perceived the school was not efficiently preventing bullying, they were more likely to discuss the victimization with their child. Grade level was negatively associated with parents' perceptions of school climate, prevention efforts and engagement. Additional findings regarding the influence of student demographic variables (race, gender, grade level) will be presented.

These findings add to the extant prevention research by demonstrating an influence of the school context on parents' responses to their child's victimization. This underscores the importance of a systemic approach to violence prevention and intervention efforts. We will discuss the implications of this research with regard to potential factors that may influence parents' reactions to their child's victimization, and provide suggestions for collaborative prevention and early intervention efforts between parents and schools.

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