

BULLYING PREVALENCE IN MISSISSIPPI:  
A COMPARISON OF URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS

by

Valarie Mechell McCaskill

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Shante' Moore-Austin, Ph.D., Committee Chair

David S. Benders, Ph.D., Committee Member

Dorothy Prestwich, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott B. Watson, Ph.D, Associate Dean, Advance Programs

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the prevalence of bullying in urban and rural schools in Mississippi. Students at eight middle schools completed the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire to identify bullies and bully victims. The results of the study showed that approximately 50% of students in both urban and rural schools were identified as being bullied once or more during the current school term. There was no significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools based on students who attended the eight middle schools who participated in the study. However, there was a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at schools that had implemented Bully Prevention programs and schools that had not implement Bully Prevention programs. In addition, the study revealed that there was a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying among gender sets. The results also indicated that even though there was not a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools, there was a difference in the type of bullying that was most prevalent at the schools. The study also included suggestions for future research.

*Keywords:* bullying, prevalence, Anti-Bullying programs, rural, urban

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Oliver and my children Amanda & Anthony. I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandchildren Chasity and Aaron.

## **Acknowledgments**

I acknowledge God as my personal savior and for being my Rock and Shield. Next, I would like to acknowledge my professor and research consultant, Dr. Scott Watson who worked with me from the beginning to the end. I also would like to acknowledge my Chair, Dr. Shante' Moore-Austin who never wavered in her support and direction. Likewise, I would like to acknowledge my LU Reader, Dr. David Benders and my Outside Committee Member, Dr. Dorothy Prestwich. In addition, I would like to thank my two editors Jordan Rice and Sheawanna Woods. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my Aunt Frances would never ceased to pray continuously for me during this journey.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Though bullying among school children is hardly a new phenomenon, highly publicized media accounts have brought the topic a great deal of attention recently (Scarpaci, 2006). Bullying is defined many different ways and no universal definition has been agreed upon. However, there are many authorities that have given their own personal definition of bullying. Most researchers' definitions of bullying are similar and they often overlap. The characteristics of bullying is defined as unfair, aggressive, frightening, intentional tormenting, hurtful or negative behavior, and repeated attacks that involve the imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim or manipulative behavior by someone who is stronger against a small or weaker person that happens repeatedly over time (Kohut, 2007, Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, 2004, Rigby, Smith, and Pepler, 2004, Scarpaci, 2006, Owelus, 1996, & KidsHealth.Org, 2011). Bullies tend to gain satisfaction from hurting or demoralizing their peers. According to Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, Owelus, Scarpaci, Kohut, bullying in school may be expressed in many different forms such as physical (hitting, punching, tripping, and spitting), nonphysical (taunting, harassing phone calls, threats, extortion, racist remarks, malicious lies or rumors), and nonverbal (rude gestures, ostracizing, writing vulgar and degrading thing on walls and the internet) (McGraw, 2008, Roberts, 2006, & Sanders 2004).

Simpson (2008), stated that it is important to note that not all fighting, teasing, and taunting among children at school is considered bullying. Circumstances, common language usage, and excepted cultural norms must be taken into consideration, but he did note that no school is exempt from bullying urban or rural. However, Fitzpatrick, Dulin,

and Piko (2007) and Malecki and Demaray (2003) stated that there is a higher prevalence of bullying in urban settings because of certain risk factors being present such as socioeconomic status, higher exposure to violence, and family dynamics. Hundreds of children have been wounded and killed in school shootings and bullying has been named a culprit in a number of these shooting; therefore bullying must be addressed nationally and locally, and in schools across America (American Psychological Association, 2009, Sampson, 2008, Scrapaci, 2006, & Kids Health, 2007).

### **Problem Statement**

Bullying was once thought to build character and simply a rite of passage for many youth. Now, bullying is seen as a problem in most schools in the United States with serious consequences according to Olson (2007) and Sampson (2008) who also states that bullies are real and cause a great deal of harm to other students. According to Kids Health (2007), bullying is a huge problem that affects millions of kids and suggests that three quarters of all kids have been bullied or teased in school. Likewise, Nansel et al, 2001 conducted the first national study in America that found that an estimated six million students (approximately 30%) were involved in frequent bully incidents during the school year that the study was conducted. Similar results were found in a study conducted in South Carolina that found approximately 20 percent of the students who completed surveys were bullied with regularity according to Sampson (2008). According to many researchers, bullying occurs more often at school than in the students' home environment (Olweus, 1996, Scrapaci, 2006, Whitter, 2008, & Olson, 2007). These acts of bullying can make children feel really bad and sick. Likewise, bullying can make children not want to play outside or go to school. Severe cases of bullying negatively

affect students' academic achievements; therefore, many students find it hard to focus on schoolwork. Some students spend every waking moment in school in fear. Not knowing when the next incident will occur can create a negative perception of school (Kids Health, 2007 and American Psychological Association, 2009).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Causal-Comparative study is to determine if bullying is more prevalent (widespread) in urban schools or rural schools in Mississippi and to reduce the amount of bullying that occur by implementing more bully prevention programs. For the purpose of this study, bullying will be defined as any repeated harmful acts in which there is an imbalance of power, such as one child or a group of children repeatedly hitting, kicking, spiting, taunting, intimidating, or name calling of another student who is afraid, smaller, or weaker. There is little or no evidence of research on the prevalence of bullying in urban or rural schools in Mississippi. Bullying must be seen as an epidemic that negatively impacts many children and cannot be ignored by school administrators, whether they are in rural or urban areas in Mississippi.

### **Significance of the Study**

Olweus (1999) who is considered a renowned authority on bullying noted risk factors such as poverty, drugs, alcohol, abuse, violence, single family homes, and peer pressure (gangs) increase students' likelihood to become bullies themselves or the victims of bullying. On the contrary, the American Psychological Association notes that approximately 40%-80% of student experience bullying at one time or another regardless of socioeconomic environment, sexual orientation, religion, or race. According to Mental Health America (2009), there are significant ramifications of bullying. Bullying can

cause long term psychological trauma to the victims that can adversely affect their actions and decision making. Bullying affects as many as 29.9 % of students, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2001). Some victims who suffer from high incidences of school bullying are vulnerable to depression and may eventually engage in self-destructive acts including suicide and murder (Whitter, 2008). According to Roberts (2005), author of *Bullying from Both Sides*, the bullies oftentimes suffer as well. These individuals who are school bullies tend to continue their aggressive patterns of behavior into their adulthood and continue to commit acts of violence. Schools officials need to be aware of the level of bullying that exists on their campus, because research has shown that many students are reluctant to report acts of bullying against them. Sampson (2008) reported that 66% of bully victims were reluctant to report they were bullied because they thought school personnel would not believe them, the situation would not be address, or fear of retaliation that participated in a study done in America with middle and high school students. The data gathered from this study can help educators in Mississippi determine the level of bullying that exist at their schools and may help reduce the number of bullying incidents that occur by assisting in implementing bully prevention programs (Sampson, 2008, Milson and Gallo, 2006, Shore, 2006, & Marzano and Marzano, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

The research questioning guiding this study are:

**RQ1:** Is bullying more prevalent at urban schools than at rural schools in Mississippi?

**RQ2:** Is bullying more prevalent in schools without anti-bullying programs in Mississippi than schools with anti-bullying programs in Mississippi?

### **Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses are:

**NH<sup>1</sup>:** There will not be a significant difference in the amount of bullying that occurs in urban and rural schools in Mississippi as indicated by the Olweus Bullying/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ).

**NH<sup>2</sup>:** There will not be a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at schools without anti-bullying programs than schools that have implemented anti-bullying programs.

### **Identification of Variables**

#### **Independent Variable**

The independent variable in this study is rural and urban schools in Mississippi. The eight schools are separate entities and operate solely on their own within totally different school districts. Students must attend the schools in this study to be participants.

#### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in this study is bullying as defined by Olweus (1993): any repeated harmful acts in which there is an imbalance of power, such as one child repeatedly hitting, kicking, spitting, taunting, intimidating, or name calling of another student who is afraid of them, smaller, or weaker. The act of bullying will be identified through the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire.

### **Research Plan**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to try to determine if bullying is more

prevalent (widespread) at urban or rural schools in Mississippi. The researcher will utilize the causal-comparative research design to complete the study which will look at both the independent and dependent variables. The study will look at eight different schools, four from urban communities and four from rural communities. The study will compare data from the rural schools to the data collected from the urban schools to see if there is a significant difference in the amount of bullying that is present in the schools. The participants in the study will be given confidential surveys by their school counselors in their character education classes. The researcher will utilize the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire to identify potential bullies or bully victims. The study will attempt to determine if the independent variables will manipulate the dependent variable.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Bully(ies)** – The person(s) inflicting the pain or harmful act or person who is the abuser and is stronger (Kohut, 2007, Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, 2004, Rigby, Smith, and Pepler, 2004, Scarpaci, 2006, Owelus, 1996, & KidsHealth.Org, 2011).

**Bullying-** Bullying is any repeated harmful acts in which there is an imbalance of power, such as one child or a group of children repeatedly hitting, kicking, spiting, taunting, intimidating, or name calling of another student who is afraid, smaller, or weaker (Kohut, 2007, Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, 2004, Rigby, Smith, and Pepler, 2004, Scarpaci, 2006, Owelus, 1996, & KidsHealth.Org, 2011).

**Cyber bullying-** is repeated and willful harmful acts inflicted by and through the use of electronic devices such as cell phones, computers, and social networks that malicious and intentionally inflict harm on others (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007, Rooney, 2010, Roberts, 2006, & Meyer, 2009).

**Prevalent-** Is defined as widespread in a particular area, occurring often, extensive. Some synonyms are prevailing, predominant, and dominant (Webster's Dictionary, 1913).

**Victim-** The weaker person whom pain or harmful act are inflicted upon or the person who is being abused (Kohut, 2007, Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, 2004, Rigby, Smith, and Pepler, 2004, Scarpaci, 2006, Owelus, 1996, & KidsHealth.Org, 2011).

A correct understanding of the terms used in this paper is vital, because they will be utilized often in the upcoming chapter which is the Literature Review. Various terms will be used in a manner that coincides with or references bullying. Chapter two further expounds on the prevalence of bullying, the impact, and prevention.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In this literature review the researcher will utilize other studies to help define and understand bullying. The literature will look at different aspects of bullying and the many effects it can have on the victim as well as the bully. The literature will also look at the devastating effect that bullying can have on a school and students' academic achievements. Finally the literature will examine ways to prevent bullying in schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The underlying theories in this review of literature are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Cognitive Learning Theory, and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory.

Maslow believed that there are five categories of needs that are similar to instincts and play a major role in motivating behavior. According to Maslow (1943) satisfying the lower-level needs is important in order to avoid unpleasant feelings or consequences. The five levels of needs are physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualizing.

- Physiological needs include the most basic needs that are vital to survival, such as the need for water, air, food, and sleep.
- Security needs include needs for safety and security. Security needs are important for survival, but they are not as demanding as the physiological needs.
- Social needs include needs for belonging, love, and affection. Maslow considered these needs to be less basic than physiological and security needs.
- Esteem needs that apply after the first three needs have been satisfied. Esteem needs are needs that become increasingly important over time.

- Self-actualizing needs are the highest levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

These people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinions of others and in interested fulfilling their potential (Maslow, 1943).

Students cannot learn and be productive if they do not feel safe. Bullying hinders students' education and oftentimes causes students to drop out or become very fearful of school and become physically sick when made to attend (Scarpaci, 2006).

According to Wertsch (1979), the Social Development Theory argues that social interaction precedes development; consciousness and cognition are the end products of socialization and social behavior. Bullying comes in many forms and can hinder students academically, emotionally, and socially. Victims of bullying suffer from verbal and physical abuses which often affect them psychologically. Victims of bullying often have low self esteem and are ostracized by peers. Likewise, victims who suffer from high incidences of school bullying are vulnerable to depression and may eventually engage in self destructive acts including suicide. Positive school cultures are critical to support students socially, physically, and academically (Scarpaci, 2006).

According to Malecki and Demaray (2003), students might carry weapons with alarming frequency to school. According to the authors, a study done in 2000 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that approximately 7% of high school students had a weapon on school grounds. In addition, 8% of those students in the study reported that they had been injured or threatened by students carrying a weapon at school. The rates for middle school students carrying a weapon to school were staggering:

- 47% of *inner city* youth carry a knife or gun to school during their middle school years,
- 14% of middle school students in southern states carry gun, knife, or club to school,
- 10% of students nationally carry some type of weapon to school during their middle school years (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2000).

According to Malecki and Demaray (2003), many of the students in this study reported that they had little or no guidance or social support from parents, older siblings, teachers, or community members. Likewise, risk factors such as alcohol use, drug use, gang affiliation, violence in the home, lack of family support, access to weapons, and poverty were commonly cited and researched. Malecki and Demaray predicted that more boys than girls carry weapons to school. In addition, the authors noted that perceived peer support also increases the amount or level of bullying.

According to Kevin Jennings (2005), Founder and Executive Director of Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network , a study was conducted that clearly illustrates the prevalence of bullying and harassment in America's schools. The study also revealed that students who experience bullying and harassment are more likely to miss classes which can impact a student's ability to learn. The study concluded that two thirds (65%) of teens report that they have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability or religion. The reason most commonly cited for being harassed frequently is a student's appearance, as four in ten (39%) teens report that students are frequently harassed because of the way they look or body size. The next

most common reason for frequent harassment is sexual orientation and one third (33%) of teens report that students are frequently harassed because they are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual (Jennings, 2005).

According to Jennings (2005), the majority (57%) of students who experience harassment in school, regardless of demographics or reasons for the harassment, never report these incidents of harassment to teachers or other school personnel. Although teachers reported feeling comfortable with intervening in observed bullying or harassment, only one in ten (10%) students who do not report these incidents believe teachers or staff will do something to help improve the situation. Two thirds (67%) of students who have experienced harassment never report such incidents because the students believed that the school staff would not do anything or things would get worse (Jennings, 2005).

This survey shows the need to bridge the gap between the support that teachers provide to students and students' perceptions of teachers' willingness to take action (Jennings, 2005). Teachers must be made more aware of bullying and the problems that students are having in school and classrooms. Teachers must also be willing to identify themselves as resources and be available to students who experience bullying and harassment in their classrooms. Likewise, The Journal of the American Medical Association (2009) recently reported that one third of U.S. students experience bullying, either as a target or a perpetrator. A high level of parents (47%) and teachers (77%) report children victimized by bullies. Bullying and violence caused 160,000 fearful children to miss one or more school days each month. Only a small percentage (18%) of

children believe that telling adults will help. Children generally feel that adult intervention is ineffective and only perpetuates more harassment.

Smartt (2009) noted that bullying often results in drastically changed lives. The person being terrorized can become a person who kills, or simply withdraws and never reaches his potential in life. The students being bullied often just set education aside due to being labeled a "nerd," or "freak" by peers. Students will often become low achievers and dumb down to impress peers or change peers' perception. Bullying can destroy students' reputations and cause students to become depressed, withdrawn, and even suicidal (Smartt, 2009). This is a national problem that needs to be tackled head on through political and community. This is not a fad problem that will go away. Bullying is not an issue that can be taken lightly as a "kids will be kids" thing. If allowed to continue, bullying will wreck children lives, schools, communities and even a nation. Educators need to learn and participate in the preventive efforts that are in effect, or help create new ones (Smartt 2009).

Likewise, it is essential that both rural and urban communities be examined for levels of bullying activity according to Franklin (2010). Franklin stated that there are problems associated with the perception of communities and the actual existence of these communities. Concepts of urban and rural communities sometimes are from the reality that students face that actually lives in these communities (Franklin, 2010). Franklin also noted that media can sometimes send a false perception of communities displayed in magazines, internet, and television. They often create advertisements that reflect luxurious, affluent, and privileged neighborhoods which often send a false notion of community. Many parts of urban cities, such as Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles,

are drug ridden, plagued with gang violence, and poverty stricken, but they are portrayed as glamorous in the media. Likewise, many rural communities have high unemployment rates, high poverty rates, are plagued with prejudice, and lack much cultural amity that are common in urban cities (Franklin 2010).

These problems that exist with communities can raise many difficulties for young children that continue to manifest into adulthood (Franklin, 2010). The student's main goal is to hide the truth, oftentimes by any means necessary. The children's primal instinct is to be safe and eat; everything else is second, even education. According to Franklin, the concept of urban and rural communities also plays a huge role in the educational process, especially public education. Franklin attributes this to the fact the many young children bring issues from their home environments to school. Franklin stated the educators must examine the barriers of communities and collectively work together to break these barriers down and build a new sense of community within the school walls that make students feel safe so that they can focus on learning.

According to Espelage and Swearer (2011), bullying is a phenomenon that is very complex and consists of multiple factors and outcomes. The authors note that they frame bullying from an ecological perspective which includes both verbal and physical abuse. Espelage and Swearer also note that bullying is comprised of three things: antecedents, behaviors, and consequences. The authors suggest that every child who bullies has a different complex set of factors that contribute to his or her bullying behavior. Espelage and Swearer list certain factors that contribute to this bullying phenomenon:

- Home environment
- Cultural influences

- Community influences
- Peer groups
- School

Espelage and Swearer (2011) state that bullying is not defined by one simple explanation but is the result of many complex social and psychological interactions that the bully may experience. Espelage and Swearer also note that there are many effects of bullying that the victim may experience such as anxiety, fear, and social pain that can lead to the brain being altered. These neurological changes can cause individuals to have personality changes (Espelage & Swearer, 2011). The results of their study suggested that bullying outside and inside of school negatively affected the perception on school safety.

Likewise, Sanders and Phye (2004) stated that explaining the phenomenon of bullying theoretically has been challenging to numerous educators and researchers. Therefore, many different perspectives have been applied to bullying. In recent years much attention has been given to factors that may have implications on theoretical or conceptual frameworks that may explain the occurrence of bullying (Sanders & Phye). According to the authors strong emphasis has been placed on three areas:

- Social
- Moral
- Cognitive

The authors also state that bullying is a dyadic interaction and is a huge problem many countries, states, cities, communities, and schools. However, Sanders and Phye emphasized that bullying is most present in schools and that it has a detrimental effect on student's educational experience. Alarming, the authors note that the bullying

phenomenon has been escalating from single bullies to group bullying. In addition, Sanders and Phye also cited recent research data that suggested approximately 90% of students in schools could be categorized as being part of bullying situations. Therefore, it is essential that educators recognize the seriousness of bullying and seek to create bully intervention programs to change the culture within schools and to make students feel safe (Sanders & Phye 2004).

### **Prevalence of Bullying**

According to Dan Olweus (2000), bullying in schools is much more prevalent than school administrators realize. He bases his conclusion on several large scale surveys. Olweus conducted numerous studies in many cities and countries. He estimates at least 15% of students in primary schools are bullied on regular basis at school. Olweus also notes that bullying has become a global epidemic.

The United States Department of Education conducted a study in 2006 that suggests over three million violent offenses happen on or near school campuses. Unfortunately, solid documentation does not exist to accurately determine how many of these incidents were bully cases. All too often, bullying happens in remote location that are out of sight and the adults are unaware of the actual number of bully incidents. Likewise, many children do not report when the bullying took place or where the bullying took place to the appropriate adults (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Another issue addressed was shame and embarrassment. According to the U.S. Department of Education, many students are too embarrassed and ashamed to admit that they were bullied. Therefore, many students withhold the truth about being victimized by

bullies when taking self surveys and limit the effectiveness of the instrument because of bias.

Oweleus (2000) also states that bullying is more physical in lower grades and that most bullies are older and stronger than their victims. Roberts (2006) also states that bullying is a huge problem and notes that the magnitude of bullying is far greater and more prevalent than anyone can imagine. Even though physical bullying still takes place in secondary school verbal bullying is more prevalent. Olweus further notes that in the past, bullying tended to be more prevalent in boys than girls, but in recent years bullying incidents have been increasing among the female gender. Olweus concludes that there are higher levels of aggression among males and links it to biological attributes and environmental/social roots.

According to Roberts (2006), the occurrence of bullying and teasing in schools are on a continual rise and noted three recent articles that highlight the magnitude of bullying in schools:

1. *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in Schools (2004)*
2. *Talking with Kids about Tough Issues: A National Survey of Parents and Kids (2001)*
3. *Bullying Behaviors Among U.S. Youth: Prevalence and Association with Psychological Adjustment (2001).*

Roberts suggests that the findings from all three recent reports are staggering and heightens the reality of the level and magnitude of bully prevalence in classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and playgrounds at American schools. According to Roberts, the

Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) 2005, concludes that bullying in U.S. schools is substantial and must be addressed at the National, State, and Local levels.

In addition, Roberts (2006) suggests that there is a link between exposure to violence on television, electronic media, the internet, and media to bullying among school age children and adolescents. According to Roberts, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that over 1,000 confirmed studies link aggression in children to media violence. Younger children seem to be more prone to act out violence seen in the media. Roberts links this to immaturity and the inability to discern between media and real life.

According to Roberts (2006), bullying has become a common occurrence in school settings. The finding from the study noted that only 2.1% of the participants in the study stated that they had never been bullied since they begin attending school. While over 50% of the students reported that they had been bullied once or more during the current school term. However, 14% of the students noted that they had been bullied almost every day.

Likewise, Roberts (2006) study also noted that bullying was a growing phenomenon among boys and girls because there was no significant difference in the number of incidents report among boys and girls as bullies or bully victims. However, the study did show that different types of bullying was prevalent among the genders. Roberts states that boy bullies were more destructive and violent than girls and the girls did more name calling, teasing, and ostracizing. Roberts asserts that girls do more indirect bullying by utilizing subtle forms of bullying to harass their victims.

In another study on the prevalence of bullying, Derby (2004) suggests that there is a link relationship, group dynamics, and bullying, especially involving girls. He

highlights the instability among girl friendships and the heighten anxiety that jealousy and envy can bring. Derby states that relational bullying may account for the rise in bullying among girls in recent years. He also notes that relational bullying can be very complex because friendships also exists among the group dynamic. According to Derby, the National Middle School Association did an international study in 2006 that found approximately 15% of school populations are bully victims.

Likewise, Hinduja and Patchin (2009) noted that a number of recent research studies have suggested a high prevalence of bullying in the United States. According to Hinduja and Patchin, a study done by Nansel et al., 2001 noted that 11 percent of 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10 were bullied each year. The authors also stated that similar studies suggested schools in the U.S. have a high prevalence of bullying, somewhere between fourteen and nineteen percent.

According to the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2009), Diane Alexander, M.D. (2006), bullying has become a national epidemic and warrants attention. In a recent study, over sixteen percent of the nation's school age children stated that they were victims of bullying, and thirteen percent acknowledged being bullies. In addition, 8.8% of those students noted that they had bullied other students numerous times in a week. The NICHD also noted that bullying happens more in grades six through eight. The study also shows that there was not a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying in rural and urban areas, but they did note that there was a higher prevalence of boys bullying compared to girls. The study also noted that those students who were identified as bullies had other behavior problems

as well, such as drinking, smoking, social isolation, and performing poorly academically (NICHD, 2009).

### **A Comparison: Urban and Rural Schools**

According to Preston (2009), the definition of urban is any city with over 10,000 people. Urban areas are considered metropolitan areas as well with continued growth and construction. Most inner-city schools are urban schools and are located in up-coming and thriving communities. These schools are highly populated (Preston, 2009). Preston also noted that some student services lack as well in urban schools because of the pupil teacher ratio is so high. Likewise, Preston noted that many of these students have low socioeconomic statuses. Urban schools have very diverse populations, such as ethnic, religious, and linguistic. They also have a large immigrant population (Preston, 2009). According to Preston, Urban schools tend to have a more diverse curriculum as well. The author also noted that urban schools often times have a high dropout rate depending on the demographical make-up. Student discipline and classroom management are issues as well. They seem to plague the majority of urban (inner-city) schools (Preston, 2009). Alarming statistics are revealed in a study done in 2002 by the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, which noted that fifty percent of teachers in urban schools quit or change professions because of student discipline problems and classroom management issues. Youth from urban communities often display disruptive and aggressive behavior in the classroom setting (Preston, 2009).

According to Preston (2009), inner-city schools have a reputation of being very challenging in comparison to regular urban schools. Inner-city schools have more problems because the students' home environments are difficult, and they often times

have emotional issues and suffer from psychological problems. Alcohol, drugs, and dysfunctional families are the most common social issues that plague inner city schools. Gang affiliation is also a rising problem in inner city schools. They give students a false sense of identity, protection, and family (Preston, 2009). According to Lipman (2004), the communities where most youth attend inner city and urban schools suffer from inequalities, economic inequalities, and continual racial exclusions. Youth that come from these stifling communities seem to reproduce and intensify the problems generation after generation (Lipman, 2004). Lipman linked the issues of race and poverty back to the 1950s when white flight happened. When the middle class white flight occurred in urban cities around the U.S., racial isolation, urban disinvestment, and increase poverty levels heightened political tensions and put a strain on the education system across the country (Lipman, 2004). The author also noted that when the mass of industry left the cities it created schools that were to become more and more disadvantaged. These inequalities still exist in urban schools today. Mostly African American and Latinos attend inner city schools (Lipman, 2004).

Preston (2002) defined rural as towns or communities with less than 10,000 people that are outside of the communities' zone. According to Preston, most rural communities are isolated and are mostly farm communities. A problem facing many rural communities is youth migration. Many young people from rural areas are leaving, going to college in urban areas, and are not returning (Preston, 2002). Preston noted that advances in technology, automation, and commercialization are greatly affecting employment opportunities in rural areas. Fewer and fewer children are taking over the family business in rural communities, such as the fishing industry, farming, forestry, and

mining. Therefore, many rural communities are not economically sound and lack diversity, leaving very little to be desired by young, educated, and ambitious people (Preston, 2002). Likewise, the economic decline ultimately affects public education. Preston also noted that there are advantages and disadvantages to rural education. A noticeable strength of rural schools is their classroom sizes. Most rural schools have low teacher-pupil ratios. Small classroom sizes allow for more teacher and student interaction and allows for stronger bonding among faculty and students. Therefore, there are few classroom management issues and student discipline problems in the classroom (Preston, 2002). According to the author, more rural students participate in extracurricular activities. Preston defended his stance by citing Bake and Group (1999) who conducted a five year study that included fifty-two schools in both urban and rural settings. The findings from this significant study concluded that participators in extracurricular activities were about twenty times higher in small rural schools than larger urban schools. Student attendance and student dropout rates were other factors that Preston addressed. She stated that the school climate in rural schools was directly related to higher attendance and lower dropout rates. According to Preston, students in rural schools seem to have a greater sense of responsibility to their school, classmates, teachers, and community, which pushes them to be more committed to finish school (Preston, 2002). However, it is important to note that there are many researchers who totally disagree with Preston's assumption that the dropout rate is lower in rural schools and even suggest that it is higher due to minority population, high-unemployment, and low-incomes. The opposition also noted that males in these high-poverty areas are more likely to dropout than their counterparts (females) (Preston, 2002).

The next advantage of rural schools that Preston (2009) expounded on is rural schools and their ability to service at risk students and students with special needs. According to Preston, recent research shows that rural schools have more of a positive effect on these at risk students who are more likely to fall through the cracks of educational systems in larger urban schools. Preston stated that there is a greater sense of family in rural communities. Teachers in rural schools tend to go to church, socialize, and have personal relationships with the parents of their students. Therefore, they know their students better and are able to work more closely with the families to gain support.

The last advantage noted by Preston (2009) is less bureaucracy in rural schools compared to urban schools. The rural schools tend to be less complicated and have personal relationships with the stakeholders. Parents and administrators have better communication and less red tape exists.

On the other hand, Preston (2009) also suggested that there are many challenges and disadvantages that exist in rural schools as well. She begins with the inability of rural schools to provide a diverse curriculum with many options for the students. According to Preston, this is a huge problem, especially for high schools in rural areas. The lack of resources is another challenge in rural schools. According to Preston, a study completed by Nachtigal (1992) concluded that textbooks, computers, counseling programs, and IT services with limited and negativity affects the curriculum and student growth in rural schools. The lack of these resources also compounded the problem of retention and recruitment of teachers in small rural communities. Other factors that affect teacher retention were low spousal employment opportunities, ineffective administration, and dissatisfaction with rural lifestyles (Preston, 2009). Some educators also expressed

that they felt isolated professionally in rural schools and that there was a serious need to establish some professional learning communities to foster support for staff members (Preston, 2009). Many teachers in rural schools must teach multi-leveled classes and often times teach outside of their specialty area and are ill prepared. There are also noted administrative issues that exist in rural schools such as the lack of assistance available, the long list of duties and responsibilities, and low pay. Many administrators in rural areas also have to teach class as well (Preston, 2009).

Likewise, many issues also plague small rural schools. They oftentimes receive less financial assistance per pupil than urban schools. Therefore, the low enrollment rates stifle rural schools too. Coupled with the burden of transporting students long distances with the price of fuel steadily increasing, financial hardships are placed on the school system (Preston, 2009).

### **Bullying Defined**

Bullying is defined many different ways and no universal definition has been agreed upon although there are many authorities that have given their own personal definition of bullying. Most researchers' definitions of bullying are similar and overlap. Essentially, most researchers agreed that bullying was hurtful or negative behavior, imbalance of power, unfair and repeated attacks (Rigby, Smith, and Pepler, 2004). According to KidsHealth.org (2011), bullying is defined as intentional tormenting in any verbal, psychological, or physical manner. Bullying can be categorized as:

- hitting
- name calling
- shouting

- spitting
- mocking
- threatening
- ostracizing
- spreading rumors
- posting hurtful things on social networks
- texting
- e-mails

Olweus 1999, a renowned authority on bullying, defined it as an unequal amount of aggression and strength between perpetrator and the victim in verbal, physical, or relational. Breakstone, M. Dreiblatt, and K. Dreiblatt (2009) defined bullying as frightening or hurting others who are weaker repeatedly over time. The authors also state that there are many forms of bullying such as:

**Physical:**

- hitting,
- pushing,
- spitting
- kicking

**Verbal:**

- name calling
- put downs
- threats
- insults

**Emotional or social aggression:**

- ostracizing
- rumors or lies
- silent treatment
- extortion

**Cyber:**

- using technology to hurt others
- posting hurtful things on social networks
- texting or e-mailing
- posting videos or photographs to hurt or embarrass someone (M.Dreiblatt, and K. Dreiblatt,2009).

Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan (2004) defined bullying as aggressive, negative, or manipulative behavior by someone who is stronger against a smaller or weaker person that happens on a continual basis of time. Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan also stated that bullying is abusive and is an imbalance of power that is often systematic, organized, and hidden. According to Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan bullying also takes on many forms such as:

**Physical**

- punching
- tripping
- hair pulling
- biting
- scratching

- chocking

**Nonphysical:**

(a) verbal abuse

- taunting
- phone calls
- extortion
- threats
- racist remarks
- sexual teasing
- malicious lies
- rumors

(b) nonverbal

- rude gestures
- making mean faces
- excluding ostracizing
- poisonous letters
- writing degrading things on walls and in the bathroom
- damaging property (tearing clothes, destroying personal property, ripping or destroying books, or taking property).

According to McGraw (2008), bullying is no laughing matter and can cause some very serious physical and emotional harm. McGraw asserted that bullying is verbal or physical attacks that hurt someone that is done relentlessly over a period of time.

Physical bullying can lead to broken limbs, scars, or worst case scenario death. McGraw

also noted that verbal bullying can be just as damaging if not worst because the emotional scars are effective to victims for a lifetime and sometimes the victims take their own life. Students who are different from their peers tend to be primary targets for bullies as well as students who are smaller or weaker (McGraw, 2008).

In addition, McGraw (2008) stated that there are various types of relationships that exist among bullies and their victims. The first type of relationship bullying is two-faced so called friends. These people act like they like you or are your friend, but in reality they do not like you or are jealous of you. These types of bullies usually try to entrap the victim or pressure them to do bad things or dumb things by calling the victim a chicken or wimp. These types of bullies will also use their friendship as leverage against the victim (McGraw, 2008). The second type of relationship bully is stuck-up kids. These bullies act as though they are better than the victim and works hard at ostracizing the victim. They also try and turn other students against the victim (McGraw, 2008). The third type of relationship bully is the bad mouth bully who spreads vicious lies or rumors about their victims. These types of bullies often lie or deny their involvement but will not cease from spreading the lies or rumors because they want the malicious attacks to continue to hurt the victim (McGraw, 2008). The fourth type of relationship bullies are the Group Bullies. According to McGraw, children cluster together in groups of gangs to bully for many different reasons:

- (1) they're scared
- (2) to fit in with the "in group"
- (3) a sense of family or belonging
- (4) they derive the same prelude as the head bully

McGraw noted that group bullies are probably the worst because the bullies combine their might and are often times more aggressive and more violent. Many group bullies and gangs have seriously injured their victims even to the point of death (McGraw, 2008). The fifth and final type of relationship bully McGraw discussed is the Girl Bully. As shocking as it seems, girls often bully more than boys especially in recent years. McGraw stated that girls can be relentless and can devastate their victims. In recent years, many instances of brutal bully attacks by girls have been recorded and uploaded on YouTube. Likewise, McGraw asserted that girls can be mean minded and often plot out schemes to destroy their victims. Violent acts which include the use of weapons are growing among girls in the U.S. at astonishing rates (McGraw, 2008).

According to Roberts (2006), the nature of bullying must be defined and understood before it can be effectively prevented. Roberts suggested that teasing, victimization, taunting, harassment, and hazing are all similar and fall up under the heading of bullying. Roberts uses Olweus' 1993 conceptualization of bullying in his book *Bullying from Both Sides: Strategic Interventions for Working with Bullies and Victims*. Olweus 1993 defined bullying as repeated exposure to negative actions of a long period of time by one or more persons against a weaker person that is intentional (Roberts, 2006). Olweus 1993 emphasized the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. Roberts also noted that bullies tend to target victims that are incapable of protecting themselves.

Sanders (2004) also acknowledged that there is not a universally accepted definition of bullying, but states that many world renowned researchers accept and use Olweus's 1993 definition. According to Sanders, bullying is not a new problem but has

existed in schools, homes, prisons, nursing homes, and the workplace for a long time, but suggests the bullying is most prevalent in the school setting than any other arena.

Roberts goes on to clarify that no school setting is exempt such as rural, urban, private, boarding, or charter. Roberts maintains that bullying occurs in all schools.

Dan Olweus (1999) defined bullying in the book *The Nature of School Bullying* as negative actions intentionally inflicted on a weaker person by a stronger person that injury or cause discomfort repeatedly. He emphasized the imbalance of strength between the victim and the perpetrator noting the victim often is younger or smaller. Olweus also spoke of the imbalance of power that exists between gang bullying and their victims. Olweus uses the term “peer abuse” to label the phenomenon because in most instances bullying happens at school or in the work place among peers. He compared it to child abuse or spousal abuse; most abusers have relationships with their victims.

Olweus is careful to distinguish between aggressive behavior/ violent behavior and bullying. Aggression and violent acts can occur one time or multiple times, but bullying is present when it happens repeatedly over a period of time. Aggressive behavior or conflict can occur among two or more people who are approximately the same age, weight, physical stance, and mental status. Moreover, violent and aggressive acts happen between people who are not acquainted with one another, just a random chain of events that caused their paths to cross, such as road rage, murder, rape, or robbery (Olweus, 1999).

According to Kohut (2007), there must be a clear understanding of what bullying is in order to control or stop it. Kohut acknowledged that there are many definitions of bullying but elects to use Norwegians world renowned researcher Dan Olweus definition:

“A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons. Negative actions are when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical conduct, through words or in other ways. Note that bullying is both overt and covert” (Olweus, 1991) pg. 19. Kohut also emphasized the fact that bullying is not present when a pattern emerges that involves the same person over an extended time frame. She also noted that behaviors that are intended to inflict harm or humiliation to someone who is weaker or smaller are acts of bullying such as:

- Verbal mockery or harassment
- Deliberate ostracizing
- Lies or false rumors
- Threats
- Physical assault
- Pranks
- Destroying or stealing someone else’s property
- Humiliating graffiti
- Racial slurs
- Inappropriate touching
- Facial gestures
- Mobbing
- Physical and emotional intimidation
- Stalking
- Forcing persons to commit acts unwillfully

Randel (2001) also agreed that there is no one way to define bullying, but asserted that one must know or recognize bully actions or characteristics. He gave a basic definition of bullying as someone repeatedly saying or doing hurtful things to someone else who they have power over and involves entering into someone else's personal space such acts are:

- Name calling/racial slurs
- Extortion
- Hitting/kicking
- Destruction of property
- Threats/intimidation
- Deliberate ostracizing
- Writing demeaning things on walls/texts/Facebook/YouTube

Beane (2005) stated that one must be able to define a problem before it can be solved. Likewise, Beane also noted that one must also know what bullying is not. He makes note that bullying is not just teasing nor is it normal activity among children, or just a boy thing. Beane declared that it is essential for parents, teachers, administrators, and students to recognize and be able to differentiate between bully acts and non-bully acts. Beane suggested that classroom teachers need to co-design a definition of bullying with their students. He asserted that this will help students by introducing the process of identifying bullying. The teacher can lead the discussion and a student takes notes on the board. After the discussion on bullying is complete, have students write individual definitions of what they think bullying is then have them to create a universal bully definition that is acceptable to the whole class (Beane, 2005). Finally, the teacher will

ask students to sign off on the accepted statement and post it in the room (Beane, 2005).

Beane describes this activity as being powerful and empowering to students because they have now engaged in an activity that allows everyone to have input and to give a common definition of bullying that everyone in the class has accepted.

Derby 2004, utilized a broader definition of bullying to define what it is. He stated that bullying is when someone intentionally harms someone else or repeatedly takes advantage of a weaker person. He also noted that bullying is constant and that the abuser may use an array of methods to bully their victims such as mental abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, or emotional abuse to inflict harm.

According to Anne Rooney (2010), the author of *Bullying FAQ Teen*, bullying is very ugly and causes a lot of fear, pain, hurt, humiliation, and despair to the victims. She also stated that bullying is an epidemic and takes different forms depending on the bully himself/herself. Bullying is a deliberate act that is intended to be mean and hurtful. Bullying also can be indirect and direct (Rooney, 2010). Rooney noted that many bullies try to be discreet and use other people to do their dirty work. Direct bullies are much more dangerous and usually resort to physical violence such as:

- Pulling the victims hair
- Cigarette burning
- Persistent kicking or hitting
- Choking
- Bending the victim fingers back
- Threats of violent acts (victims live in fear)
- Robbing or stealing from the victim

- Cyber bullying (texting, emails, social networks)

Physical bullying is very easy to identify but indirect bullying has harsh and lasting negative impacts on students physiologically (Rooney, 2010).

Cyber bullying is known to many as the new agent in which many adolescent children use to bully other children (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). What is cyber bullying exactly? According to Hinduja and Patchin, cyber bullying is repeated and willful harmful acts inflicted by and through the use of electronic devices such as cell phone and computers. Cyber bullying has become one of the most common ways of bullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Blogging, texting, and posting hurtful things to online social networks are the most common forms of attack. Hinduja and Patchin, suggested that many students use these particular avenues because they can gain a large audience to witness the abuse or attack. In a recent study done by Pew Internet and American Life Project nearly ninety three percent of teens use and have access to technology (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007). Consequently, millions of teens are using these advanced technologies with malicious intent to inflict harm on others. Cyber bullies get pleasure from humiliating their victims publically. Many teen suicides have been linked to cyber bullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2007).

According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), cyber bullying can really affect the bully victim psychologically, as well as, emotionally because of its repetitive nature. An embarrassing picture of the victim that others can access and comment on is especially hard on a bully victim. This can cause the victim great shame and humiliation that can lead to emotional instability (Hinduja & Patch 2009). Many cases of cyber bullying have been linked to teen suicides in the United States and around the world. The victims or

cyber bullying may feel helpless because they have no control over the social media (Hinduja & Patchin 2009).

Hinduja and Patchin (2009) note that cyber bullying has evolved over the years from sending malicious and threatening emails to:

- Chat rooms
- Voting/rating websites
- Blogging sites
- Virtual worlds
- Online gaming
- Instant messaging
- Cell phones

Cyber bullies use these different technologies to inflict continual torture and punishment on their defenseless victims. The authors note that there are some common forms of bullying that are used on cyber space (Hinduja and Patchin, 2009).

Photo shopping is one of the ways bullies use to hurt their victims. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), photo shopping bullying is altering pictures of someone in a humiliating, funny, and obscene way that can be retrieved by an internet search engine.

Another way cyber bullies torment their victims is rumor spreading. Rumor spreading is the intentional spreading of mean and hurtful things about someone. This form of cyber bullying is used more by female perpetrators than male (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Rumor spreading is usually done via cell phone texts, malicious emails, or posts on social networks such as Facebook (Randel, 2006). These posts are mostly gossip and hearsay that generate feedback and other hurtful comments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Trolling and flaming are new trends cyber bullies use to inflict pain or humiliate their victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Trolling and flaming are when the bully posts hostile and mischievous things that are intended to infuriate and wound the victim/victims. Identity theft and impersonization is another way bullies utilize the internet to penalize bully victims. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), bullies steal or create false emails, Facebooks, etc. and send instant messages that appear to come from an innocent person who is unaware of the acts taking place. Identity theft is also known as hijacking. Hijacking has caused innocent victims to be seriously hurt or injured (Randel, 2006). Another new and recent cyber bullying phenomenon is happy-slapping (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The bullies target unsuspecting people who are usually younger or weaker, and suddenly attack them while someone else videos the abuse and attack. These attacks are usually posted for public viewing on YouTube, Photobucket, or Flickr (Randel, 2006). Lastly, the most harmful form of cyber bullying is physical threats (Randel, 2006). These unwanted and unwarranted threats of violence are very damaging and detrimental to the bully victim's psychological health. Repeated physical threats can have lasting effects on the bully victim, even into adulthood (Randel, 2006). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) note that the prevalence of cyber-bullying is a growing phenomenon that has reached epidemic proportions that have impacted the lives of many adolescent kids. Cyber bullying is so deadly because it can be utilized in an overt manner that causes intentional harm towards another person (Randel, 2006). In a study conducted in London, two thirds of the 856 youth who participated in the study said that they had been cyber bullied, and they knew the person (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Anne Rooney (2010) also noted that cyber bullying has become one of the worst forms of bullying in recent years because the bully victim cannot escape it and it does not end when the victim leaves school. Technology allows the bully to follow the victim home. Technology enables the bully to attack the victim in their own home and room (Rooney, 2010). According to Rooney, this is devastating because home is the one place that children should feel safe. Cyber bullying can manifest in several different way such as:

- texting
- anonymous abuse
- happy slapping (videos on phones)
- emails
- instant messaging
- blogs
- social networks (Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube).

Technology offers many different avenues to attack someone (Rooney, 2010). Rooney tells about several real life incidents where the bullied victim killed themselves as a direct result of cyber bullying. Similarly, Roberts (2006) noted that victimization has gone high-tech. Roberts suggests that bullies have become more savvy and ruthless. According to Roberts, bullies have found a way to go underground and become more vicious by going into cyber space so that the taunting and humiliation can be continuous and never ending. Roberts defined cyber bullying as using electronic devices to intimidate, harass, and hurt others. He also stated that the victims of cyber bullying suffer embarrassment, slander, and persecutions by way of texting, e-mails, instant messaging, and social networks

(Roberts, 2006). Roberts also stated concerns about cyber bullying being ignored by parents, school officials, and local authorities. He cited the Columbine massacre as a prime example of not taking cyber bullying serious.

Roberts 2003 also referenced the string of threats that preceded the slaughter by one of the perpetrator weeks prior to the attack. Cyber bullying is dangerous and cannot be ignored or dismissed easily (Roberts, 2006). There are many dangers attached to cyber bullying, especially at the secondary grade levels. Roberts also suggested that girls are more prone to use cyber bullying as their primary tool to bully other girls.

Meyer (2009) highlights the importance of acknowledging and identifying an emerging youth culture called cyber bullying. Meyer indicated that cyber bullying is rapidly becoming an epidemic that shows strong links between school and bullying. Meyer defined bullying as the use of electronic mediums to harm or threaten others. Even though recent research has shown the link between school and bullying on cyber space is an extremely hard issue for administrator to address, this phenomenon is very difficult for school administrators to address because most of the time it happens off school campus and the school does not have the authority to address the matter. Nonetheless, cyber bullying tends to have a huge negative impact on students educational experience (Meyer, 2009).

### **Current Events: Bullying in American Schools**

Bullying is becoming so prevalent that many school districts across America have resorted to adopting more stringent zero tolerance anti-bullying policies according to Perez Pena (2011). Likewise, the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, alone with his wife Michelle Obama are making serious note of the need for

increased effort to reform anti-bullying laws that can help schools and local communities nationally (Calmes, 2011). The Department of Education's civil rights office has amped up their efforts to inform schools of their legal duties of protecting students, no matter their ethnicity, race, or sexuality against bullying (Calmes, 2011).

These new laws could not have come at a better time according to Perez (2013) would recently wrote a New York Times article on a 12 year old boy named Bailey O'Neil fro Darby Township, Pa., who died from a seizure which was the result of a concussion from being hit in the face by a classmate two months earlier. The parents attributes the death of their son to bullying. Perez also speaks of another teen death that has been associated with bullying, 15 year old Amanda Todd. According to Perez, Todd killed herself after making a video which she asserts that she had been stalked, blackmailed, and seduced. Perez asked the question, "Was this done by other students or an adult?" Well, according to Perez, no one know and sends a word of caution to lawmakers and school officials. Perez states that there need to be a clear definition for bullying because sorting through accusations can be a burden on the school, especially those with zero tolerance policies.

According to Hu (2011), another tragic story involving a 12 year old boy happen just a few years earlier. Young Joel Morales took his own life by hanging himself in the bathroom from the shower curtain. Hu (2011), reports numerous accounts from schoolmates, persons from the community, and family members of Joel's long term suffering at the hands of bullies. According to the article, the family had contacted the police, school, and apartment complex with complaints of bullying and the harassment of Joel. Several of Joel classmates stated that they tried to take up for him and protect him.

Joel was reported to be very small and was often picked on by the same group of boys (Hu, 2011). The spokeswoman for the school district stated that she could not discuss the case and the housing authority stated that they had to have consent from Joel's family to discuss the matter (Hu, 2011). Joel suicide is one of many in recent years. New York has recently passed new laws that require schools to implement bully prevention programs that train all staff and offer a curriculum for students on conflict resolution.

A national spotlight on bullying is warranted according to Perez Pena, 2011. He cited the recent suicide of a Rutgers student as a warning sign for a more complex problem that plagues many schools and universities across America. The Rutgers case has gained national attention and has made it to New Jersey's superior court. Bullying is said to be the main perpetrator. Dharum Ravi has been charged with intimidation, invasion of privacy, sexual harassment, and deception of authorities. Ravi allegedly set up a webcam and recorded a sexual encounter of his roommate and a male partner and broadcasted it. Three days later, his roommate killed himself (Perez –Pena, 2011).

Similarly, an Anoka-Hennepin school district dealt with eight suicides in the last couple of years. According to Eckholm (2011), school officials for the school district stated that at least four of the students who committed suicide were either gay or bisexual. The school officials also acknowledged that these students struggled with sexual harassment from their peers (Eckholm, 2011).

As a result of the Rutgers University incident that drew national attention, New Jersey enacted a new law against harassment and bullying that is said to be the toughest law in the nation (Perez-Pena, 2011). The new law names specific people to be responsible to run the anti-bullying programs at schools and district levels. The law has

zero tolerance elements for schools and colleges. The governor of New Jersey and the New Jersey School Board both endorse the law and said that there must be some drastic changes made with accountability. The New Jersey law has made bullying a criminal offense (Hu, 2011). Hu also agreed that the new anti-bullying law in New Jersey is a direct result of the freshman's suicide at Rutgers University. Hu suggested that the public's outcry about bullying and the student's suicide propelled legislators to take a stand which resulted in the new law known as the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights.

According to Hu, the law stated that every school must appoint a specific person to investigate bullying complaints that must report to the district anti-bullying coordinator that will be evaluated by the state Department of Education. Superintendents have been directed to report any educator who does not comply, which could result in the loss of licensure (Hu, 2011). However, not everyone agrees with the new law (Hu, 2011). Richard G. Bozza is one of those people who have not been shy about voicing his opinion (Hu, 2011). Bozza, the executive director of the New Jersey School Administrators Association, is against the policy because he feels that school districts do not have the personnel or the resources available to do this task effectively (Hu, 2011). He notes many administrators worry that this new law will incite more bully complaints and lead to law suits against the school district as responsible parties for bullying instead of the perpetrators (Hu, 2011).

Mr. Bozza also noted for the record, that rumors, gossip, and cyber bullying is almost impossible to dispel and thinks that the schools, teachers, and administrators will be blamed by disgruntled students and parents for things that are out of their control (Hu, 2011). Bozza insisted that teachers and school officials can only do so much and should

not be in threat of losing their licensure (Hu, 2011). But many supporters of the new law stated that it is long past due and that schools need to be held accountable for bullying that takes place at school in the bathrooms, cafeterias, hallways, playground, locker rooms, and classrooms.

Consequently, Kuykendall, the superintendent of Desoto County Schools in North Mississippi, released the district's new anti-bullying policy (Maxey, 2010). According to Maxey, Desoto County School District is the largest district in Mississippi and is located in the fastest growing urban metropolitan area in the state. Kuykendall noted that bullying has become a problem and the school district is raising its awareness and penalties (Maxey, 2010). The new policy has been board approved and the new initiative has been explained to the teachers and students. The policy defined bullying as any action that makes a student or school employee feel threatened or places them or their property in harm's way (Maxey). The policy also put specific procedures and forms in place for reporting and investigating bullying/harassing behavior. The policy also has a progressive component attached to it so that behavior that is not deterred will lead to expulsion (Maxey, 2010).

NEA Today today published an article recently titled "The Bully Epidemic: Yes, It's In Your School." The article highlighted the problem of bullying and expresses that raising awareness of bullying in schools in America must be a priority (Flannery, 2011). The article highlighted three teen suicides linked to bullying that has rocked the nation in recent months. A New Jersey college freshman jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge, a California teen hung himself in his backyard, and the thirteen year old who shot and killed himself with his stepfather's gun (Flannery, 2011). These high

profile cases are three of many that are becoming more heartbreaking and frequent among teens, especially the teens that have been labeled as gay or lesbian at school (Flannery, 2011). Flannery stated that many parents and educators are wondering if any of these anti bullying programs are working.

The president of the NEA, Dennis Van Roekel, noted that it is critical to the NEA's mission to help find the answer to bullying and ensure that children receive a quality education. Mr. Van Roekel stated that bullying strips students of their dignity and robs them of the opportunity to learn in a safe environment, as well as, scars them for life (Flannery, 2011). According to Flannery, bullying not only affects students emotionally, but educationally as well. Students who are victims of bullying seem to fall behind in their studies, have excessive absences, and usually drop out (Flannery). Van Roekel insisted that these one size fit all anti bullying programs do not work, that educators must personalize these programs to fit the needs of individual students with specific needs. He also noted that there must be cultural change in the school's environments to have systemic change (Flannery).

New York City has resolved to enhance their anti-bullying law which went into effect in January 2012. This change come as a direct result of the state's new Dignity for All Students Act (Phillips, 2011). New York City listed 13 protected characteristics (color, race, creed, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, origin, gender, citizenship/immigration status, disability, gender expression, or gender identity) in their new anti-bullying policy (Phillips, 2011). Every school has to appoint a Respect for All Coordinator and every school had to draw up a customized plan and submit it to the city council as to how they would implement the new policy (Flannery, 2011).

Texas is another state that has recently filed new anti-bullying legislation into law that gave schools more power to protect students from bullying and harassment (Smith, 2011). Texas has had more than its share of tragedies related to teen suicides and bullying that targets gay, lesbian, transgender, and disabled students (Smith, 2011). According to Smith, a recent study done by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network noted that only 32% of identified lesbian, gay, or transgender students reported actions being taken after they reported incidents of harassment or bullying. Mr. Frank Kbaack, a child advocate, stated that the lack of actions against bullying and harassment is a systemic problem in Texas schools (Smith, 2011)..

Bullying and harassment is not only prevalent in large cities like New York City and Chicago, but are also rampant in small towns and suburbs as well (Sulzenger, 2011). Even though, high profile cases like the suicide death of Jamey Rodemeyer, a young teen from western New York who killed himself after being tormented and harassed about his sexuality, flash across the screens of our televisions so often; they are not just happening in big cities, but are happening all across America in small towns and suburbs (Eckholm, 2011).

According to Eckholm, bullying and harassment are rampant in the suburbs as well. Many students suffer horrific treatment from their peers and find little relief from school officials because bullying is not perceived as a real problem in small towns and rural schools that many of these students feel they have nowhere to turn and take their own lives (Eckholm, 2011).

The Department of Justice Civil Rights department has launched recent investigations into unchecked complaints of harassment and bullying against gay students

in various districts (Eckholm, 2011). Surprisingly, there are many Christian conservative groups that fight against schools even addressing issues concerning homosexuality.

According to Eckholm, some suburbs are emerged in battles about sexual diversity and its tolerance. Therefore, many students are confused themselves about what is appropriate and acceptable behavior against those students who they perceive as different, gay, or lesbian (Eckholm, 2011). In many small rural towns, gossip and rumors destroy many lives.

According to Sulzeberger (2011), rural communities can be harsh and unbarring. In many of these rural cultures the telephone is some people's worst nightmare. These rural small towns and suburbs are so devastating for teens because there is no escape for the victims from the torture and torment (Sulzeberger, 2011). Sulzeberger also noted that unlike the web or large cities, small town stigma is everlasting and not easily forgotten. Therefore, many victims feel the only way they can escape bullying and harassment is through death.

### **Bullying in the Classroom**

Classroom bullying has become a major problem in America in recent years (Milson & Gallo, 2006). Bullying and victimization in schools and classrooms has become a major concern for students, parents, teachers, principals, and school psychologists. Teachers in elementary and middle schools are on the frontline for preventing bullying. Teachers see students bully each other all the time and are more able to recognize the characteristics associated with different types of bullying such as physical, verbal, and psychological abuse. This knowledge is priceless and can help

teachers detect early signs of bullying and take immediate action (Brewer & Harlin, 2008).

According to Brewer and Harlin (2008), early prevention is also crucial because even just the initial stages of bullying can bring about negative and detrimental changes in the victimized students' actions and demeanor:

- Students may be afraid to walk home or even go to lunch.
- Students do not feel safe outside of the classroom.
- Students may sit in a desk and just stare off into the distance, not paying attention to the teacher or to anything that is going on.
- Students may develop health problems as a result of bullying (Brewer & Harlin, 2008).

Teachers must learn to recognize the indicators of bullying, in both the victim and the bully (Scarpaci, 2006). Teachers must take preventive measures before bullying occurs. Teachers must also go beyond the obvious measures of teacher awareness, constant presence, and alertness. The teachers' main responsibility is to ensure that his/her classroom environment is safe and conducive to learning. According to Beane (2005), these are something's that can create a positive, bully free class room:

- Define what bullying is
- Talk about and share facts about bullying
- Describe behaviors of bullying
- Take a survey to see if anyone in that class has been or is being bullied
- Set rules to make the classroom bully free
- Respond to bullying allegations quickly and effectively

- Teach students about friendship
- Describe the ways to cope with being bullied
- Build empathy
- Reward those that cooperate
- Teach students how to be assertive
- Maintain grade privacy
- Teach students to affirm not only themselves but others
- Teach students how to successfully resolve a conflict
- Teach students about gangs, cults, and other groups based on hate
- Teach students how to talk positively about themselves as well as others
- Make your students become more involved in classroom activities
- Be mindful of the messages you send to your students

The teacher must establish that bullying will not be tolerated in the classroom, on school grounds, or during school sponsored functions. Students must feel secure and should be able to expect that the teacher will act, and not ignore bullying in the classroom or at school (Brewer & Harlin, 2008).

### **Teacher Interventions**

According to Shore (2006), classroom teachers are at the core of any bullying prevention program. Teachers know students better than any other staff member due to the large amount of time spent with students. Teachers know students' strengths, students' weaknesses and students' vulnerabilities because teachers have the opportunity to observe how students perform in a range of situations. Teachers are thus well positioned to observe bullying incidents between students and can detect behavioral

changes that might signal that a child has been bullied, to intervene when incidents occur, and to monitor students to ensure that bullying does not recur (Shore, 2006). Prevention is a process of education, and many of the lessons students need to learn to prevent them from bullying must come from the teacher. This prevention must come through guidance to individual students or through whole-class instruction by integrating anti-bullying lessons into the curriculum. The following specific teaching strategies can be employed to bully-proof your classroom:

- Foster a climate of cooperation and caring.
- Catch a bully being kind and make a positive comment.
- Early in the school year, hold a classroom meeting to discuss bullying.
- Closely monitor students who are at high risk for being bullied.
- Inform other school staff about potential bullying situations.
- Closely supervise areas where bullying is likely to occur (Shore, 2006).

Milson and Gallo (2006) indicated that bullying will continue in schools across America until there is a philosophical shift among school personnel and how bullying and is viewed and responded to. Scarpaci (2006) also noted that research has suggested that a reduction of bullying is best accomplished through a comprehensive, school wide effort that involves everyone, especially teachers. In addition, Milson and Gallo found that many schools try to prevent bullying by using packaged programs that lack support from teachers and do not meet the specific needs of individual schools. The authors recommended securing cooperation from key personnel as an important first step in successful intervention. Many researchers have provided suggestions for important components of bully prevention and intervention programs, but few have actually

collected data with regard to program effectiveness. The following is a discussion of two successful bully prevention programs (Milson & Gallo, 2006).

Bully prevention/intervention programs work when schools have clear and consistent policies and rules (Milson & Gallo, 2006). The authors also noted that schools must ensure that a widespread perception is clear to students that bullying will not be tolerated and will have serious consequences for the bully and bystanders. Bullies are more likely to discontinue engaging in bullying behavior when confronted with dire consequences for such actions (Milson & Gallo, 2006).

Marzano and Marzano (2004) stated effective classroom management and modeling of desirable behaviors can provide a basis for enforcing rules against bullying, harassment and other disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Teachers must not ignore or dismiss student reports of bullying if their goal is to prevent or decrease bullying behavior. Teachers must take every report seriously. The establishment of classroom-specific rules for bullying has been supported as an effective component of a school-wide program. The authors also asserted that teachers can exhibit appropriate dominance by establishing clear rules, behavior expectations, procedures and consequences for student behaviors (Marzano & Marzano, 2004). Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2006) used a multilevel design to test a model in which teachers' attitudes (beliefs) about bullying (e.g., bullying is normative; assertive children do not get bullied; children would not be bullied if they avoided mean kids) were hypothesized to influence if and how teachers intervene in bullying interactions. It was hypothesized that teachers' strategies would influence how students cope with victimization and the frequency of victimization reported by the students. Data were gathered on 34 second grade and fourth grade

teachers and 363 ethnically-diverse students (188 boys; 175 girls; *M* age = 9 years 2 months) (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2006). Results indicated that teachers were not likely to intervene if bullying was perceived as normative behavior, but were more likely to intervene if either assertion or avoidant beliefs were present. Moreover, avoidant beliefs were predictive of separating students which was then associated both directly and indirectly (via reduced revenge seeking) with lower levels of peer victimization. No grade differences emerged for teachers' views or management strategies; however, minor sex differences were detected which will be discussed (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2006).

According to Rana Sampson (2008), school must provide teachers with effective classroom training that addresses bullying. Schools must monitor and ensure that all teachers have effectively implemented the learned strategies in the classroom. Sampson (2008) also noted that research suggests that today's classrooms contain more students with behavioral, social, emotional, and learning problems; therefore, the classrooms also contain more bullies and victims. Teachers must be adequately prepared to spot and stop bullying.

### **The Negative Impact of Bullying**

Bullying has a negative impact on psychosocial health. Being repeatedly bullied has been associated with an increased risk of depression, suicidal ideation, and loneliness. Being a bully is also associated with poorer health outcomes. For example, delinquency (in later life) and depression has been linked to being a bully (VanderWal, Dewit, & Hirasing, 2003). According to Roberts (2005), both bullies and victims have been found to be more depressed than students who are not involved in bullying. Depression

associated with bullying and victimization can lead to academic problems, self-defeating behaviors, and interpersonal problems. Finally, victims are particularly at risk if there is no emotional support provided or if the bullying behavior is severe and prolonged. These victims are more likely to suffer from academic problems, absenteeism, loneliness, and loss of friends. Given schools' increasing concern about helping students succeed academically (i.e., No Child Left Behind), and given connections between bullying and potential for low academic performance or dropping out of school, addressing the problem of bullying is essential (Roberts, 2005).

In addition, Dr. Mark Dombeck (2007) discusses the long term effects of bullying. Dombeck also stated that the experience of being bullied can cause lasting damage to its victims. He also noted that being the repetitive target of bullying oftentimes damages the person being bullied and causes that person to view himself/herself as undesirable, incapable, worthless. These victims who have been bullied often become bitter, angry, aggressive, violent, depressed, and suicidal (Dombeck, 2007).

Similarly, bullying has been linked to students committing suicide and violent acts against former perpetrator(s). According to the study conducted at Yale University (2008), almost all of the studies found connections between being bullied and suicidal thoughts among children. Research suggested that bullying victims were two to nine times more likely to report suicidal thoughts than other children were. Not just the victims were in danger; the perpetrators who are the bullies also have an increased risk for suicidal behaviors. The study also found that children who bullied tended to be

aggressive and lacking in a moral compass and they experienced a lot of conflict in their relationships with their parents.

In addition, it was noted that many victims of bullying have developed relationships with friends or family members that are dysfunctional or full of conflict, and the victims tended to associate with others who were bullied (Yale University, 2008). According to Lunde, Frisen, and Hwang (2006), several studies also noted that a history of exposure to appearance-related teasing is linked to body dissatisfaction. Participants were 960 Swedish 10-year-olds, 515 girls and 445 boys. Appearance teasing was associated with girls' poorer body esteem in terms of general appearance and beliefs of others views of their appearance. For boys, teasing was associated with poorer body esteem on all dimensions.

Thus, this study implies that a wider range of peer victimization relates to children's negative self-perceptions than was former known (Lunde, Frisen, & Hwan, 2006). According to Cronwell (1999), bullying strips away a victim's feeling of safety, leaving the person feeling, at times, totally vulnerable. Therefore the focus must be put on preventing bullying before it ever begins. Cronwell noted that educators need change the school culture in their buildings.

Likewise Cronwell suggests that educators need to ensure a safe environment where students are not only free of physical threat but also free of emotional and psychological threat. The harm bullies inflict on peers is less visible, but no less real, than the damage done by guns. As we have seen in the school shootings that have stunned the nation, kids who are mercilessly harassed often become angry and alienated;

sometimes to the point of exploding in lethal ways which may cause harm others or themselves (Cronwell, 1999).

To end bullying and violence, Cronwell (1999) says schools must do the following:

- Schools must have a policy on zero tolerance for weapons.
- Schools must send a clear message of zero tolerance for harassment, put-downs, and bullying.

Schools will never eliminate cliques and differences among students, but can demand that students respect one another, despite those differences, and treat every other student with dignity and respect. All students have the right to go to school without being bullied or harassed (Cronwell, 1999).

### **Bullying and Children with Disabilities**

According to Leadbeater, Marshall, and Banister (2007), previous studies have indicated significant associations between relatively poor mental health of children and both perceived negative parenting and exposure to peer victimization at school. This paper examines relative contributions to the mental status of adolescent school children. Questionnaires were administered to Australian school children ( $n=1432$ ) aged 12–16 years. These contained reliable self-report measures of mental health (the GHQ) parental bonding (the PBI) and degree of peer victimization. As predicted, multiple regression analyses indicated that low levels of perceived parental care, high parental control and frequent peer victimization were each significantly and independently associated with relatively poor mental health. Together, they accounted for some 17% and 27% of variance in the mental health status of adolescent boys and girls, respectively. Theoretical

and practical implications of these findings are considered (Leadbeater, Marshall, & Banister, 2007).

Independently, learning disabilities (LD) and involvement in bullying each pose a risk for social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Mishna, 2003). According to Mishna, children and youth with LD are more vulnerable to bullying because of their inability to function in the classroom setting like their average peers. Cleave and Davis (2006) also found that several studies of bullying and peer victimization in children with chronic conditions indicate a high prevalence of being bullied among those with certain conditions and of bullying others among children with psychological impairment. In their analysis of US children, they found a significant association between having a special health care need and being bullied by other children, bullying other children, and being both a bully and a victim. Being bullied was associated with each of the five categories of special health care needs and this association persisted when adjusting for several socio demographic variables and health-status variables.

In contrast, bullying others was associated only with an emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem requiring treatment. Having an emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem and having a functional limitation was associated with being a bully/victim (Cleave & Davis, 2006).

### **Bully Prevention**

Consequently, solving long-standing sensitive social problems through community-based programs and collaborative partnerships is going to require more than rushed policies and program efforts that react to sudden crises (Card & Hodges, 2008). Efforts to support resilient trajectories in children dealing with adversities like peer

victimization or adolescents searching for engagements and identities in communities struggling with a dramatic change in its economic base requires a sustained and coordinated effort based on the best practices. Actions must not only be knowledge based, but must also be relevant, and the “buy-in” or “pull from” those who are affected by the action as recipients or as implementers needs to be secured (Card & Hodges, 2008).

According to Scarpaci (2006), school must provide teachers with effective classroom training that addresses bullying. Schools must monitor and ensure that all teachers have effectively implemented the learned strategies in the classroom. Sampson (2008) also noted that research suggests that today’s classrooms contain more students with behavioral, social, emotional, and learning problems; therefore, the classrooms also contain more bullies and victims. Teachers must be adequately prepared to spot and stop bullying. The teacher has the ability and to limit or prevent bullying in school because they are aware of the customs and characteristics of students. Scarpaci 2006 also stated that teachers must learn to recognize the indicators of bullying, in both the victims and the bully. He asserted that awareness is the first step in preventing bullying. Some key things that teachers should look for are:

- A child’s grades begin to fall.
- A child shows a decrease in interest for school in general.
- A child will have sudden attacks or headaches and stomachaches.
- A child is caught stealing or asking for extra money.
- A child cannot explain certain injuries, bruises, or torn clothes.

Then Scarpaci gave suggestions for preventing bullying such as: (1) eliminating harassment, (2) encouraging openness, (3) practicing bullying prevention, (4) neutralizing, and (5) resolving conflict.

According to Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster (2003), bullying has been recognized as being detrimental to students' health because of mental health issues and violent behavior that has been associated with bullying cases. The author also concluded that in order to intervene in the bullying process, parents and school officials must first learn to recognize bullies, victims, and bully victim relationships. Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster recommend a school wide antibullying approach to fight the growing epidemic.

According to Sampson (2008), bullying can be effectively countered if the following things are put into place:

1. School principals are enlisted to get involved and are committed to addressing school bullying.
2. Use a multifaceted comprehensive approach to prevent bullying. This can be done by establishing a school wide policy (zero tolerance) that addresses direct and indirect forms of bullying and provide guidelines for teachers, staff, and students to follow if they see any specific acts of bullying taking place.
3. Create a bully box to increase the number of students reporting acts of bullying.
4. Develop activities in less supervised areas to limit opportunities for bullying.
5. Reduce the amount of time students spend unsupervised.
6. Enlist adult monitors in bathrooms.
7. Post signs prohibiting bullying and the consequences for it.
8. Provide teachers with effective classroom management training.

9. Train students in conflict resolution and peer mediation.

10. Provide group therapy for bullies and victims.

Likewise, Scarpaci (2008) also listed some suggestions to counter or prevent bullying:

- Teachers need to reject myths about bullying.
- Teachers need to demonstrate positive interest in student well being.
- Teachers need to ask students questions.
- Teachers need to know to how to solve conflict.
- Teachers need to have students to role play to illustrate how to deal with teasing and threats of physical aggression.
- Counselors need to have character education classes with students.
- Carpenter and Ferguson (2008) suggest that schools should:
- Administer an honest assessment of the bullying problem.
- Make a school climate change.
- Integrate bully prevention programs.
- Get teachers and parents on board with the prevention program.
- Provide character education to students.
- Have safe reporting procedures.
- Have graduated sanctions for each report of bullying instead of a zero tolerance policy.
- Consistently enforce sanctions.
- Increase the supervision of troubled spots.
- Constantly research bullying and new ways to combat it.

McGraw (2008) suggests that students can help to stop the bullying of other students. McGraw mentioned the incident in a Canadian school where a male student wore a pink shirt to school, and some older students decided to tease him. Two older students heard of the bullying, so they emailed other students asking them to wear pink. Many students wore pink and some even wore a completely pink outfit (McGraw 2008). Students need to band together in order to help prevent the bullying of others. Instead of walking away when someone is getting bullied or joining in on the bullying, students need to stand up for them. Bullying is not something that can be taken on by an individual, it needs to be taken on by the community (McGraw 2008). Derby (2004) states that it takes a coordinated effort between students, parents, and school staff to combat bullying. Students are the first line of defense when it comes to bullying. They are the ones that attend school every day and are witnesses or victims of the bullying. The second line would be the school staff (Derby, 2004). The school administrators are the ones that put the policies into effect and make sure that they are upheld, but it is the teachers that have to implement the policies. If teachers see bullying going on then they need to step in instead of ignoring it. The last line of defense are the parents. Parents need to keep a watchful eye on their children. If a parent notices something is different with his or her child, find out what is going on with the child (Derby, 2004).

Breakstone, Dreiblatt, and Dreiblatt (2009) that a school needs to change its environment into a safe and supportive instead of violent. The school needs to be spotlighted in positive ways instead of negative. In order to do this, schools can:

- Create expectations instead of rules.

- Reward thoughtfulness and respect of other students.
- Increase monitoring of high bullying areas
- Make sure all school staff is helping maintain a bully free environment for students.
- Set a tone of respect for all students and school staff.

Breakstone, Dreiblatt, and Dreiblatt (2009) noted that empathy needs to be prevalent in the school as well. Empathy will allow the children to be able to feel what the bullied children are feeling. It can help make the children that are not victims of bullying to speak out against the bullying of others. According to Breakstone, Dreiblatt, and Dreiblatt (2009) these are several ways to encourage children to develop empathy and abilities to respond to their peers in a constructive manner:

- Help students put their emotions into words in a positive context
- Let students know it is okay to feel out loud or voice their feelings
- Interweave discipline into the discipline structure
- Reward students for showing empathy
- Adults must be patient. This process takes time.

## **Summary**

America has to acknowledge that bullying has become a national epidemic and begin to work collaboratively with policy makers, practitioners, and researchers to advance this agenda. Involving decision-makers and knowledge users in the formulation of knowledge has been highlighted as the best predictor for the application of research knowledge. Community-based research can ensure that research results are relevant to a wider audience and thus hasten adoption beyond the immediate communities (Card & Hodges, 2008). Sampson (2008) noted that all of us are concerned about bullying and the potential levels of violence it brings among young people in various communities and schools across America. Studies have suggested that approximately 60% of children in American schools are the victims of bullying and that most children who have been identified as bullies go on to have arrest records. Bullying must be addressed because it has serious implications on the aggressors, as well as, the victims. Therefore, it is vital that school environments are places where all children can feel safe and learn to the best of their abilities (Sampson, 2008). School administrators, must enlist the help of teachers, parents, student representatives, local community agencies and members to combat the growing problem of bullying that exist in schools today (Milson & Gallo, 2006).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Bullying is a problem and school settings are not exempted. Some research suggests that bullying is more prevalent in urban schools, but it is important to know that all children who attend public, private, rural, or urban schools are subjected to be bullied. Bullying is a pervasive problem and can sometimes be under recognized because of the low injury or death rate that actually occurs from bullying (Fitzpatrick, Dullin, & Piko, 2007, Sampson, 2008, Olweus, 1996, Jennings, 2005, & Dombeck, 2007). However, the amounts of nonfatal acts of physical aggression, ostracizing, verbal abuse, and emotional abuse are often higher (Orpinas, Horne, & Stanisewski, 2003, Garbarino and deLara, 2002, & Roberts, 2006). Researchers Fitzpatrick, Dullin, and Piko also noted that bullying is more prevalent among youth from high poverty urban areas. The authors also noted risk factors such as poverty, drugs, alcohol, abuse, violence, single family homes, and peer pressure (gangs) increase students' likelihood to become bullies or bully victims (Malecki and Demaray, 2003, & Olweus, 1996).

### **Research Design**

The researcher utilized causal-comparative research design to determine if bullying is more prevalent in urban or rural schools in Mississippi. The research design was chosen because it can look at both the independent variables (urban and rural schools) and the dependent variable (bullying) to see if there is difference and determine the causes of this difference. There was not a random selection of students. The researcher attempted to get data and feedback from all students attending identified middle schools in Mississippi.

## **Research Questions**

The research questioning guiding this study are:

**RQ1:** Is bullying more prevalent at urban schools than at rural schools in Mississippi?

**RQ2:** Is bullying more prevalent in schools without anti bullying programs in Mississippi than schools with anti bullying programs in Mississippi?

## **Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses are:

**NH<sup>1</sup>:** There will not be a significant difference in the amount of bullying that occurs in urban and rural schools in Mississippi as indicated by the Olweus Bullying/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ).

**NH<sup>2</sup>:** There will not be a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at schools without anti bullying programs than schools that have implemented anti bullying.

## **Participants**

The sample population consisted of students from eight schools in Mississippi. Four school sites will be located in urban metropolitan areas and the other four will be located in rural areas in Mississippi. The first set of participants attended urban middle schools in Mississippi. The first school in the study is located in Clarksdale, Mississippi (228 females and 206 males/418 African Americans, 10 Caucasians, 1 Hispanics, and 5 Asians). The second school is a middle school in Greenwood, Mississippi (191 females and 198 males/380 African Americans, 6 Caucasians, and 3 Hispanics). The third school is located in Batesville, Mississippi (329 Females/324 Males/ 237 African Americans/384 Caucasians/42 Hispanics). The final urban school is located in Tunica, Mississippi (281

Females/321 Males/593 African Americans/ 8 Caucasians/1 Asian). The next set of participants were from rural schools in Mississippi. The first middle school is in Cold Water, Mississippi (245 females and 357 males/549 African Americans, 72 Caucasians, 4 Hispanic, and 1 Asian). The next school is a middle/high school in Coahoma County, Mississippi (255 females and 270 males/503 African Americans, 16 Caucasians, and 6 Hispanics). The next middle school is located in Quitman, Mississippi (243 females/236 males/471 African Americans, 5 Caucasians, and 3 Hispanics). The final school is located in Leflore County, Mississippi (318 Females/300 Males/609 African Americans/2 Caucasians, and 7 Hispanics). This was a convenience sample. No student names were used and all surveys and forms were anonymous (Mississippi Department of Education: Office of Research and Statistics 2012).

### **Setting**

The study took place in Mississippi, students at eight middle schools were surveyed: four urban schools and four rural schools. The students were given the confidential surveys by the school counselor. Each student was also given an envelope to seal their form in to return to the counselor. The counselors administered the surveys by grade levels during their character education classes. In addition, all discipline forms for the current year were evaluated and categorized. Only those forms that had offenses that fit the definition of bullying were utilized in the study. Some examples are spitting, hitting, students being jumped by more than one student, punching, name calling, threatening, malicious text messages, or extortion, writing demeaning letters or messages on walls, and etc... The state accreditation system in Mississippi Public Schools has five levels which are failing, at risk of failing, successful, high performing, and star school.

The scale to reach accreditation increases every year, so there is an increased pressure to reach a successful status. Some of the schools in the study have been ranked as Failing or At Risk of Failing for the 2012/2013 school year.

### **Instrumentation**

The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) was utilized to identify any bullies or bully victims. The OBVQ was created and revised by Dan Olweus, a researcher in the field of bullying. Olweus (1996) stated that the revised OBVQ reliability rate is 0.90 as indicated by the results of a study that involved 130,000 participants, the range of internal consistency done in a study of 130,000 participants. The questionnaire consists of questions that measure direct and indirect bullying, where bullying is most likely to occur, and the attitudes of bullies and bully victim. According to Kyriakides, Kalogirou, and Geoff (2006), the OBVQ is very reliable as shown in a study that examined the instruments validity and reliability: “Analysis of the data revealed that the instrument has satisfactory psychometric properties; namely, construct validity and reliability.

The conceptual design of the instrument was also confirmed. Support was also provided for the relative prevalence of verbal, indirect and physical bullying. Conclusions: The OBVQ is a psychometrically sound instrument that measures two separate aspects of bullying (the bully and the bully victims), and whose use is supported for international studies of bullying in different countries (Kyriakides, Kalogirou, and Geoff, 2006, 789)”.

The student were given the definition of bullying that was taken from the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (1993): Bullying is when someone (boy/girl) hits, grabs, pushes, kicks, spits, or trips you on purpose. Bullying is also when someone (boy/girl) calls you names or threatens you in a hurtful manner. Bullying is someone (boy/girl) who

tells other students not to like you or be your friend. Bullying is when these events continuously happen and you feel afraid or scared of that person.

### **Procedures**

The researcher submitted an application to the Liberty University Internal Review Board (IRB) Committee for approval. After receiving permission from the IRB the researcher proceeded with data collection. The IRB approved the study, then the researcher requested permission to do the study in the schools from the superintendent of each school district. After gaining permission, the researcher contacted each school to set up the first visit. Next, the researcher visited the schools to speak with the counselor and administrative staff about the specific details and timeline for the study. The researcher gave the counselors the consent forms for parents and the assent forms for the students. The counselor was also given notices to post and a recruiting script. The counselors were also given the anonymous bully questionnaire forms and envelopes. The researcher established a time to return and pick up the surveys and the disciplinary referrals. The researcher sent a reminder e-mail to the counselors notifying them of day and time of the return visit. The researcher did not offer the participants any money for participating in the study, but the counselors did give the students a free homework pass for their participation. The counselors gave the students the definition of bullying utilized in the study and also informed the students what bullying was not. The counselors discussed culturally accepted language and joking among friends. Likewise the counselors explained the importance of the study and how essential it is for students to be totally honest when completing the questionnaires. The students were assured of the confidentiality of the study. No names will be published, only data.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized a Chi-Square test to analyze data collected. The Chi-Square test takes the frequency count from a particular sample and compare them to an expected frequency count of entire population. The Chi-Square test assesses whether there is a statistical difference between the observed results and the expected results. The Chi-Square test utilizes procedures for analyzing nominal data which is called a nonparametric test. Nominal data must be treated different from interval data. The researcher examined the amount of bullying present at urban and rural schools in Mississippi. The Chi-Square test was utilized to support or disprove the null hypothesis. The data will show either a significant difference or no significant difference between the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools in Mississippi. The data was collected from the OBVQ and discipline referrals. The researcher utilized certain criteria to determine if a student can be listed as a potential bully or bully victim. The scale on the OBVQ must identify the student as a bully or bully victim to be considered in the study. Then the number of forms that identified bullying will be crossed referenced with discipline referrals that involve act of bullying as defined by Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (1993) to see if students are reporting acts of bullying. There were several categories of bullying such as direct forms (physical and verbal) of bullying and indirect forms (emotional and psychological) of bullying.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

In this chapter, the results of this study will be discussed. The chief investigator utilized a bully survey questionnaire to investigate the prevalence of bullying in urban and rural schools in Mississippi. The study was a quantitative study and the researcher utilized the casual-comparative design to complete the study. The independent variables in this study are rural and urban schools in Mississippi. The dependent variable in this study is bullying as defined by Olweus (1993). The study utilized the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire to collect the data and student discipline referral. The participants in the study were given confidential surveys by their school counselors in their Character Education classes. The data was analyzed utilizing the Chi Square Test.

### **Demographics from Student Surveys**

Of the 1765 participants in the study, 898 were females (50.9 %) and 867 were males (49.1 %). Approximately 947 (53.7%) students were from urban schools and 818 (46.3%) were from rural schools. Eight middle schools in Mississippi were represented in the study, four urban and four rural. There was a span of four grade levels within the schools fifth, sixth, seventh, and eight. The average age of the participants ranged from 10-14. All raw data for this study can be located in Apendix C.

### **Analysis of Data**

The researcher utilized SPSS Statistics to run the Chi-Square test (Nonparametric) on the data for statistical analysis. The Chi-Square test is often used to analyze school data because it is a good fit for categorical data, which is data that consists of counts and frequencies. If the value is greater than the expected count then there is a significant difference in the data. The analyses of the data revealed that there was no significant

difference between the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools in Mississippi. In urban and rural schools, approximately fifty percent (50%) of students who participate in the study reported that they had been bullied.

### **Bullying Prevalence**

The phenomenon of bullying was no stranger to half of the students at urban and rural schools in Mississippi that participated in this study. The other half of students who participated in the study reported that they had not been bullied during the current school term. Only a minimum percent, 11.3%, of students reported that they had only been bullied once. On the other hand, 33.5% of students reported that they had been bullied on numerous occasions. These numbers are similar to other nationwide studies done in the United States.

### **Research Question One and the Null Hypothesis**

Results of the statistical analysis fail to reject the null hypothesis for research question one, (Is bullying more prevalent at urban schools than at rural schools in Mississippi?) The null hypothesis was: There will not be a significant difference in the amount of bullying that occurs in urban and rural schools in Mississippi as indicated by the Olweus Bullying/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ). The analysis of data showed there was no significance of difference between the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools. The researcher utilized the Chi Square test to analyze the data collected. The data revealed that the value difference was .000 which is less than the expected count 5 according to the Pearson Chi Square test.

Count		Victim		Total
		Yes	No	
School type	Urban	480	467	947
	Rural	415	403	818
Total		895	870	1765

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.000 <sup>a</sup>	1	.984	1.000	.511
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.000	1	.984		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	.000	1	.984		
N of Valid Cases	1765				

(a). 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. (b). Computed only for a 2x2 table

There was no significance of difference between the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools. The value was .000 which is less than the expected count 5 according to the Pearson Chi Square test. The p value was 1.000, indicating no significant difference in the two groups (rural as compared to urban schools).

**School Type \* Victim Cross tabulation**

		Victim		Total
		Yes	No	
School Type	Urban			
	Count	480	467	947
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
	% within Victim	53.6%	53.7%	53.7%
	% of Total	27.2%	26.5%	53.7%
	Rural			
	Count	415	403	818
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
Total	% within Victim	46.4%	46.3%	46.3%
	% of Total	23.5%	22.8%	46.3%
	Count	895	870	1765
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
	% within Victim	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%

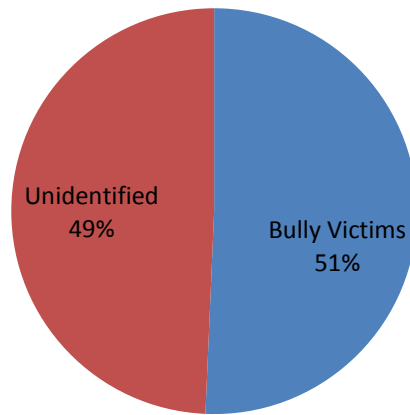
### Was bullying more prevalent at urban or rural schools in Mississippi?

Table 1: Identified Bully Victims

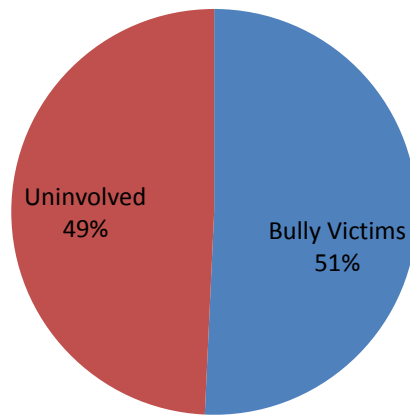
<i>Schools</i>	<i>Bullied</i>	<i>Uninvolved</i>	<i>Total</i>
Urban	480	467	947
Rural	415	403	818
Total	895	870	1765

Based on the bully/victim questionnaire, students were classified in two different groups: bully victims or uninvolved

### Prevalence of Bullying in Urban Schools in Mississippi



### Prevalence of Bullying in Rural Schools in Mississippi



Likewise, there was no significant difference between the numbers of students who identified themselves as bullies at urban or rural schools. The value was 1.693 which is less than the expected count 5 according to the Pearson Chi-Square Test.

### School Type \* Self Identified Bullies Cross tabulation

Count

		Self Identified Bullies		Total
		Identified	Uninvolved	
School type	Urban	302	645	947
	Rural	263	555	818
Total		565	1200	1765

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.693 <sup>a</sup>	2	.429
Likelihood Ratio	1.692	2	.429
Linear-by-Linear Association	.128	1	.720
N of Valid Cases	1765		

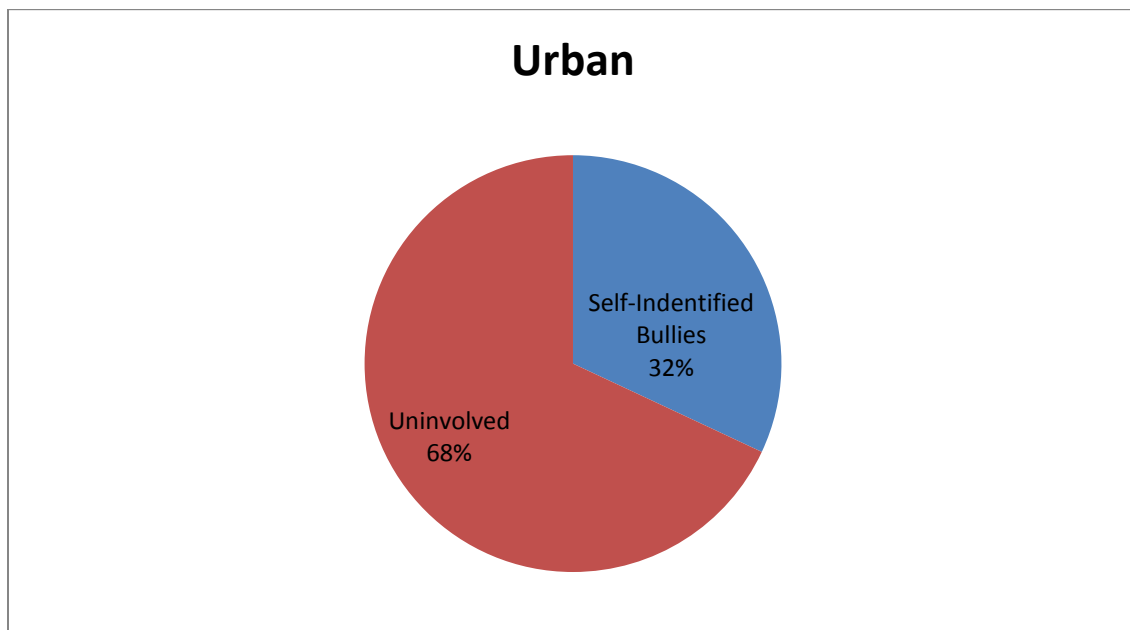
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

### School Type \* Self Identified Bullies Cross tabulation

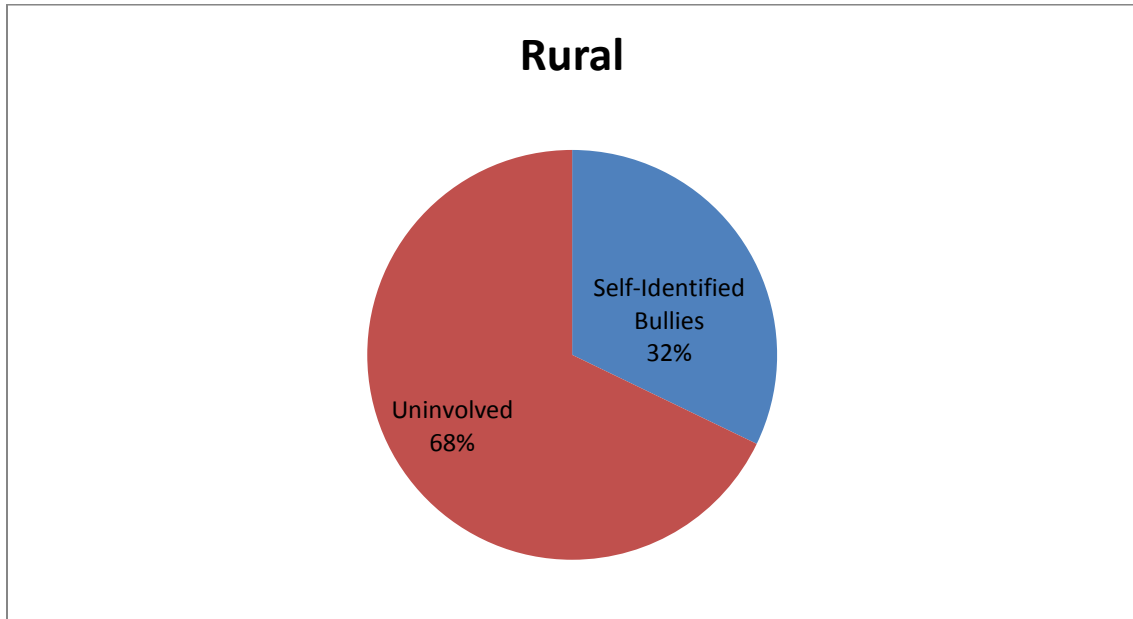
		Self Identified Bullies			Total
		Girls	Boys	Uninvolved	
School type	Count	176	126	645	947
	% within School Type	18.6%	13.3%	68.1%	100.0%
	Urban	55.9%	50.4%	53.8%	53.7%
	% within Self Identified Bullies	10.0%	7.1%	36.5%	53.7%
School type	Count	139	124	555	818
	% within School Type	17.0%	15.2%	67.8%	100.0%
	Rural	44.1%	49.6%	46.3%	46.3%
	% within Self Identified Bullies	7.9%	7.0%	31.4%	46.3%
Total	Count	315	250	1200	1765
	% within School Type	17.8%	14.2%	68.0%	100.0%
	% within Self Identified Bullies	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	17.8%	14.2%	68.0%	100.0%

Table 2: Self-Identified Bullies

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Uninvolved</i>	<i>Total</i>
Urban	303	644	947
Rural	263	555	818
Total	566	1199	1765



Based on the bully/victim questionnaire, students were classified in two different groups: bullies or uninvolved



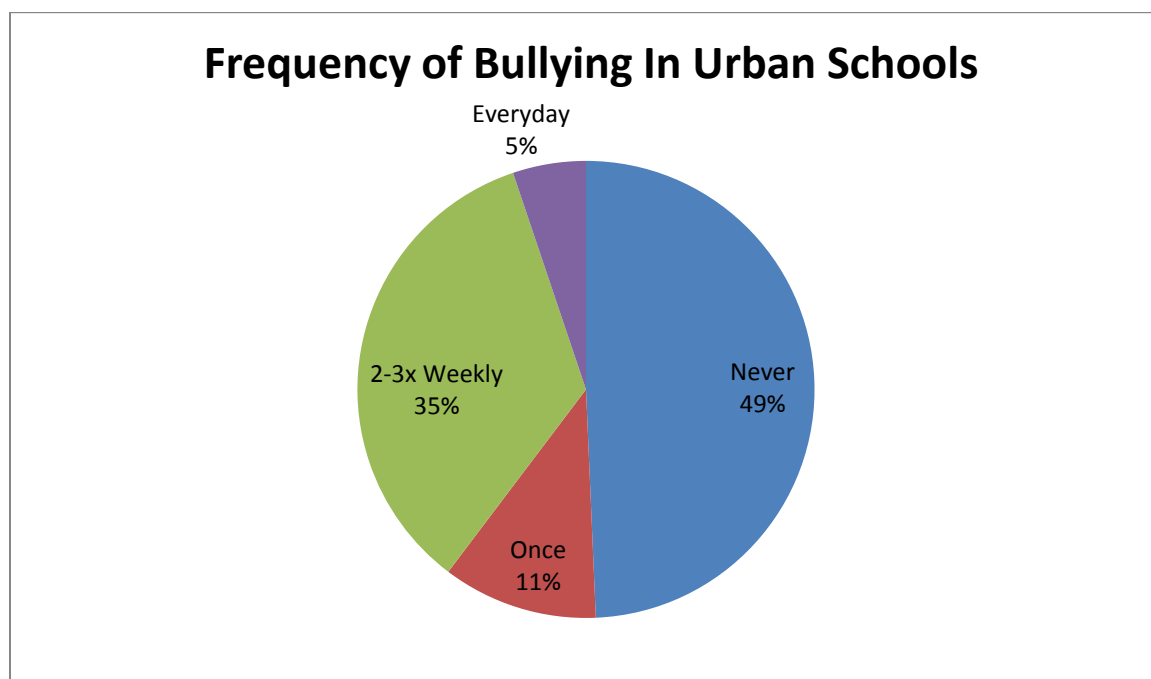
Based on the bully/victim questionnaire, students were classified in two different groups: bullies or uninvolved.

In examining the prevalence of bullying the study investigated the frequency of bullying. Half (50%) of students who participated in the study were identified as bully victims who had been bullied once or more in the current school term. Eleven percent of the participants from urban schools noted that they had only been bullied once and 12% of rural students noted that they had only been bullied once. However, 35% of participants from urban schools reported that they had been bullied two or three times a week and 32% of participants from rural schools who reported that they had been bullied also reported that they had been bullied two to three times a week. In addition, 5% of students from urban schools reported that they had been bullied everyday and 7% of students from rural school reported that they had been bullied every day.

Table 3: Frequency of Bullying

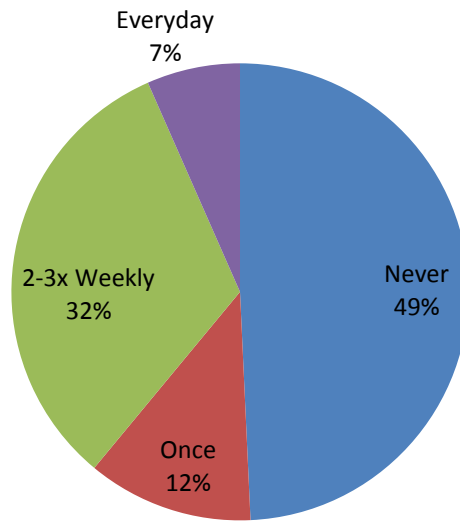
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>2-3x Weekly</i>	<i>Everyday</i>	<i>Total</i>
Urban	467	104	327	49	947
Rural	403	96	265	54	818
Total	870	200	592	103	1765

Data based on the 1,765 students who participated in the study



Based on the 1765 participants in the study

## Frequency of Bullying at Rural Schools



Based on the 1,765 participants in the study

Another factor that had implications for the study was the type of bullying (verbal, physical, and emotional) that was prevalent at urban and rural schools in Mississippi. Students can experience bullying in many different facets; the instrument utilized in this study had three different ways:

- Verbal
  - called mean and hurtful names or teased in a hurtful or mean way
  - lied on, false rumors spread about you, or try to persuade others to dislike you
- Physical
  - hit, kicked, slapped, pushed, shoved, spit on, or hair pulled
  - extortion/money or belongings taken/property destroyed
- Emotional
  - ostracized, excluded, or completely ignored,
  - threaten with violence or bodily harm to self or property

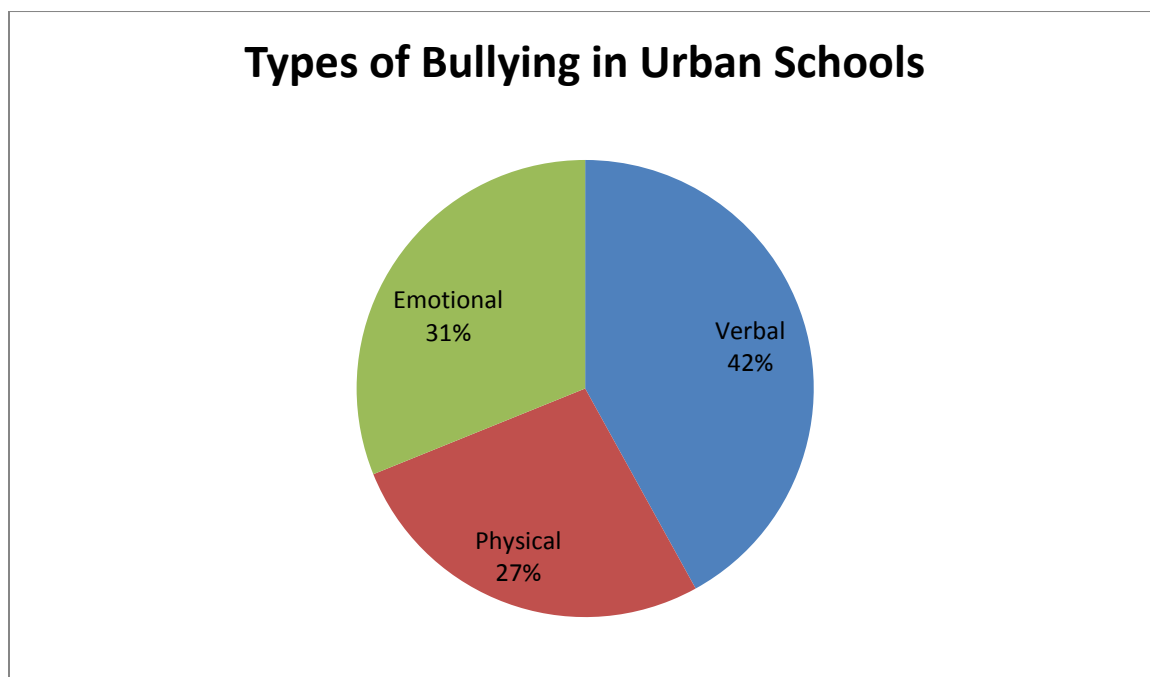
cyber-bullying/mean and hurtful e-mails, text messages, or postings on social networks

### **How did students experienced bullying in urban and rural schools in Mississippi?**

Table 4: Types of Bullying Experience at Urban and Rural Schools in Mississippi

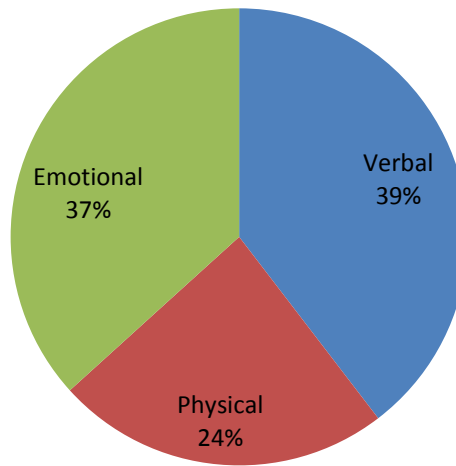
<i>Types of Bullying</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Verbal	499	483
Physical	320	289
Emotional	370	448

Data based on number of selected items by students identified as victims



Data based on number of selected items by students identified as victims

## Types of Bullying in Rural Schools



Data based on number of selected items by students identified as victims

Overall, more verbal aggression was shown in the study at both urban and rural schools as confirmed by students who reported they had been bullied mostly through name calling and teasing in a harmful or mean way. Emotional bullying was more prevalent at rural schools than urban schools. However, physical bullying was more apparent at urban schools than rural schools in the study. Consequently, bullying is detrimental to all students who experience bullying whether it is verbal, physical and emotional. This study showed a high prevalence of bullying in schools in Mississippi, at both urban and rural schools with half of the participants in the study reporting numerous acts of aggression against them on multiple occasions. Even though it was determined that girls were most often the bully culprit especially with verbal aggression, boy bully victims were no less impacted because they had a higher level of physical aggression reported. As a bi-product of this study, gender was found to have a significant role in bullying. The Pearson Chi-Square showed a significant difference (10.264) in genders

that were bullied. Essentially, the study found that the number of girls (n=494) who were identified as bully victims outnumbered the boys (n=404) who were identified as victims. Likewise, more girls (n=315) in the study identified themselves as bullies than boys (n=250) who identified themselves as bullies. Commonly, other research studies have shown a shift in gender bullying from predominately boys to predominately girls in recent years.

Were the bully acts of aggression reported to school officials?

Table 5: Reported Bully Acts at Urban Schools in Mississippi.

Reporting bully acts	Yes	No	Total Bullied
Did you report that you were being bullied?	125	183	467
Did the person you reported the bully act to address the issue?	46	77	

Data based on students who responded to the questions.

Table 6: Reported Bully Acts at Rural Schools in Mississippi.

Reporting bully acts	Yes	No	Total Bullied
Did you report that you were being bullied?	89	165	403
Did the person you reported the bully act to address the issue?	38	51	

Data based on students who responded to the questions.

The question that is so often left unanswered is, “Why so many children are being bullied in our schools today?” and a bigger question is, “Why aren’t they telling anyone?” The number of unreported bully incidents in this study was staggering. Approximately 60% of the urban students responded, “No” to the question of, “Had they

reported being bullied to anyone?” and about 65% of the rural students responded, “No” to the question of, “Had they reported being bullied to anyone?” An estimated 416 students did not even respond to the question of, “Did you tell anyone?” Sixty one percent of the urban students who indicated they had reported being bullied to someone responded that the issue had not been addressed. Likewise, 57% of rural students who indicated they had reported being bullied to someone responded that the issue had not been addressed.

### Research Question Two and the Null Hypothesis

Is bullying more prevalent in schools without anti-bullying programs in Mississippi than schools with anti-bullying programs in Mississippi? There will not be a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at schools without anti-bullying programs than at schools with anti-bullying programs.

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.699 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000	.000	.000
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	22.164	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	22.838	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.686	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	1765				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

**Bully\_Prevention\_Program \* Bullied Crosstabulation**

			Bullied		Total
			Yes	No	
Bully_Prevention_Program	Yes	Count	161	247	408
		% within Bully_Prevention_Program	39.5%	60.5%	100.0%
		% within Bullied	18.3%	27.9%	23.1%
	No	Count	718	639	1357
		% within Bully_Prevention_Program	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%
		% within Bullied	81.7%	72.1%	76.9%
Total	Count		879	886	1765
	% within Bully_Prevention_Program		49.8%	50.2%	100.0%
	% within Bullied		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

### **Do Anti-Bullying Programs Deter Bullying?**

Contrary to the null hypothesis, there was a significant difference between the schools that had implemented bully prevention programs and the schools who had not implemented bully prevention programs. The value was 22.699 which is greater than the expected count 5. Discipline infraction sheets were collected from all the schools in the study and examined. Only two of the schools in the study had low incident rates. The two schools with low incident rates were the only two schools in the study that had Anti-Bullying Programs. The other six schools in the study had high levels of bullying and high levels of student infractions that matched the acts associated with bullying in this study. Those six schools reported that they have not implemented an official Anti-Bullying Programs. Likewise, the data showed that only 161 (18%) of students who reported being bullied attended a school that had implemented a bully prevention

program. In contrast, 718 (81%) of students that reported being bullied attended schools that did not have Anti-Bullying programs implemented. The discrepancy value was 22.699 as shown on the Pearson Chi-Square Test; The Continuity Correction was 22.164; the Likelihood Ratio was 22.838; the Linear-by-Linear Association is 22.666. The p value for the results was 0.000, indicating a high significant difference in the results for the two groups (those with bullying programs as compared to those that did not).

Table 7: Schools with Bully Prevention Programs and School without Bully Prevention Programs

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Anti-Bully Program</i>	<i>Number Bullied</i>
Urban_1	Yes	77/211
Urban_2	No	191/380
Urban_3	No	81/136
Urban_4	No	117/220
Rural_1	Yes	84/197
Rural_2	No	198/366
Rural_3	No	69/134
Rural_4	No	62/121

### General Discussion and Summary

The null hypothesis for question one “There will not be a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools” in this study was proven. The study found that there was not a significant difference in the prevalence of bullying in urban and rural schools. However, the second null hypothesis was rejected. The schools that had implemented bully prevention programs had less bullying incidents reported.

Consequently, the overall study found that eventhough the number of reported bully incidents were similar for urban and rural schools that participated in the study, approximately half of the participants in this study reported that they had been bullied at least one time this school term, but most alarming was the number of students who reported that they were bullied two to three times a week or every day. The study also revealed that more female students were being bullied and more female students identified themselves as bullies. Females also led in all but one category in the types of bullying. More females reported cases of verbal and emotional bullying, while more males reported physical acts of bullying. However, gender did not play a role when it came to reporting the acts to proper authorities. Both males and females were reluctant to report that they had been bullied. That may be due to the limited amount Anti-Bullying Programs that have been implement in the schools that participated in the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Summary of Findings and Relevant Literature**

The prevalence of bullying in the United States has made national headlines and is a widespread phenomenon that has swept across many school campuses in America. Mississippi is not exempted. This study consists of four urban and four rural schools in Mississippi. A comparison was done to see if bullying was more prevalent in urban or rural schools in Mississippi and to see if Anti-Bullying Programs were a deterrent in the level of bullying in schools that had implemented Anti-Bullying Programs. This study found that bullying was more prevalent at schools that had not implemented Anti-Bullying programs. Therefore, it is confirmation and further adds to current literature that has established bullying as a growing epidemic in our schools today. It is essential that school districts take the proper steps to implement Anti-Bullying programs to deter bullying in their schools. Likewise, school officials and law makers can no longer look the other way or deny that bullying is not a problem in American schools, and bullying must be addressed on local, state, and national levels. Funding for Anti-Bullying Laws and Programs must be at the forefront of the agenda of lawmakers, beginning with local government and extend all the way to national offices. President Barrack Obama has signed into legislation a Zero-Tolerance Anti-Bullying Act, but it must be made a priority and must receive the needed funding to trickle down to state and local levels and into schools in order to be effective.

The findings in this study show that there was not a significant difference in the levels of bullying in urban and rural schools in Mississippi. However, it did show that

half the population at both urban and rural schools that participated in this study have experienced some form of bullying. There is no state, no culture, no ethnic group, no religion, no socio economic status, no public or private school, and no demographic area such as urban or rural that is exempted from the phenomena of bullying. Many students suffer in silence every day at the hands of vicious unrelenting bullies. Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for children to be free to learn, thrive, and grow; however, in many instances, coming to school for some children is like a reoccurring nightmare that they cannot escape. God has commanded us to protect the children. Therefore, we must be proactive in our efforts to keep our schools safe and implement the programs necessary to establish a school climate that is conducive to learning.

As a byproduct of this study, it was found that girls bullied at a higher prevalence than boys. Some factors that may have resulted and may be associated with this behavior with girls are:

Substance abuse by parent(s)

Abuse/neglect

Gang involvement

Housing problems

Parent criminality

No parental supervision

Mental health problems with parents

Conflict between parents

Although this study focus was not on a specific type of bullying, cyberbullying was identified as an upcoming phenomenon. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009),

teens live in a technology driven world. Telephones have been revolutionized. People can now transcend time and space. Billions and billions of people have access to technology and the internet. Thus is born social networks, YouTube, and instant messaging. For many students, schools and social networks are where they socialize with peers. Schools are places where students of all cultures, religion, and demographics have to exist among one another (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Unfortunately some prejudices exist for unknown reasons and bullying emerges.

According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009), technology has made it easier for bullies to reach their victims. The use of modern technology has allowed bullies to extend beyond the school and physical boundaries to taunt and intimidate their victims. Individuals that cyber bully, intentionally send malicious emails, text messages, or harassing phone calls to hurt their victims. Often times, the behavior is done repeatedly and becomes more violent and threatening in nature as the bullying progresses. Individuals who utilize cyberbullying as a method of intentionally hurting someone else seek explicit or implicit pleasure by mistreating that person. Usually through the use of electronic means, the bully sends direct threats of physical attacks. The cyber bullies also name call and belittle their victims. Likewise, many cyber bullies seek to publicly humiliate their victims. These public attacks seem to give the bully intense pleasure (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations in the study. Firstly, although the study had a relative large number of participants (1,765), it could have been much larger and more data could have been collected if all the students could have participated. Consequently,

all the consent forms were not returned, which means that over 2,500 students could not participate in the study. Therefore, we did not hear the voice of all the students who attend those schools that was in the study. Secondly, only eight schools districts in Mississippi participated in the study out of 152. Thirdly, since there is no solid definition of bullying some participants may have had preconceived notions of what bullying is and it may differ from their counterparts. Lastly, there may be some bias due to the fact that it was done using a survey and there is no way to know if the participants are being honest.

### **Recommendations**

Consequently, there is no quick fix to the bullying phenomenon. Bullying is a societal issue and must be approached with collaborative efforts to be diminished. Schools, parents, and lawmakers must form collaborative partnership to effectively combat this growing issue. Fully funded legislation on bullying is the first step to correcting the problem. With appropriate funding, schools can provide the needed training for school personnel to address bullying. It is imperative that school administrators and school counselors are well trained in bully awareness and prevention. They must first understand how to detect bullying and how to prevent it in order to properly train their staffs and faculty.

In addition, counselors must place emphasis on bully awareness in their Character Education Classes. This can be done by:

Distributing Anti-Bullying literature

Have students complete bullying questionnaires and surveys

Showing movies and video clips on bullying

Have students to do some role playing activities

Training students in conflict resolution

Putting up some Zero Bullying signs

Having a anonymous bully box for students to report acts of bullying

Providing counseling for bully victims and bully perpetrators

Likewise the school administrators establish policies and protocol to deter bullying as well. School systems must:

Utilize a multifaceted comprehensive approach to effectively combat bullying

Provide mandatory training for all administrators and faculty

Implement a Bully Prevention Program

Establish a Bully Crisis Committee

Get school principals involved on the front end and communicate to students, faculty, and parents the importance of addressing and preventing bullying

Establish a school wide policy which addresses all forms of bullying (indirect, direct, verbal, physical, and emotional)

Ensure that all classroom expectations are coherent for stability

Create an Anti-Bullying Detail (extra supervision in areas that are noted for high levels of bullying)

Increase the number of classroom management professional development opportunities

Make it mandatory to investigate bullying allegations

Create a reward system for positive behavior and a consequence policy for negative behavior to be fair

Implement a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System)

Implement a Peace Program with merit rewards

Offer anger management classes

Include parents and community members

Create a PLC (Professional Learning Community) which includes students, faculty, parents, and community members

Some solutions for girl bullying could be:

Help your daughter feel good about herself without having to put others down

Help your daughter create and build her self esteem

Teach her how to choose her friends wisely

Teach her that you should stop being someone's friend if he or she is mean or abusive in any way

Show her how to avoid others, especially girls, that are confrontational

Allow her to dress and act like she prefers even if it does not conform to societies predetermined standards

Maintain positive friends around her

Be nurturing and sensitive to her needs

Allow her to improve her self esteem

Provide counseling if your daughter needs it

Be positive and a good example for her to look up to

Help her to find a way to relieve frustrations in a positive manner

Get her involved in extracurricular activities

Some solutions for cyber bullying are:

Do not give out your password or username to anyone

Do not respond to threatening or malicious messages

Do not send messages that could be perceived as offensive by anyone

Again, there is no universal way to combat bullying, but school districts can structure their curriculum to include bully awareness and prevention programs. The first step is acknowledging that bullying is real and is in every school in America. Then, take preventive measures to educate students, faculty, and parents on the dangers of bullying and the lasting affects it can have on the bullies and the victims.

### **Future Implications**

The bullying phenomenon is rampant on many of American school campuses. Yet, there are schools that still do not have Anti-Bullying Programs established. Many students have been negatively impacted by bullying and some have even lost their lives. Bullying must be taken seriously and addressed on local, state, and national levels. This study can be further extended on a much broader level to add to other literature that can enhance the movement to combat bullying and keep schools safe, not only in Mississippi, but in all states across the United States and other nations as well.

Likewise, this study can be extended to investigate the impact of gender bullying, the types of bullying (verbal, physical, and emotional), and the cultural disparities of bullying. This study was limited in addressing those specific areas due to the fact that the focus was solely on comparing the prevalence of bullying at urban and rural schools.

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## **APPENDICES**

# **Appendix A**

## **Recruitment and Consent Letters**

Date: February 20, 2013

Re: Parent Recruitment Letter

Dear Parents:

As a graduate student in the Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you choose to allow your child to participate, he/she will be asked to answer questions on a bully survey/questionnaire and seal it in a provided envelope. It should take approximately 15-30 minutes for your child to complete the procedures listed. Your child's participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

To participate, your child must attend one of the middle schools involved in the study. The counselor at each school site will have a set scheduled time to administer the survey. The surveys will be given during regular scheduled Character Education classes.

An informed consent document will be sent to you one week before the surveys will be administered. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the informed consent document and return it to the counselor by Wednesday, February 27, 2013. Please be sure to read the informed consent closely before signing and agreeing for your child to participate in this study.

If you allow your child to participate, he/she may receive a free homework pass from the counselor.

Sincerely,

Valarie McCaskill  
Chief Investigator

## **CONSENT FORM**

Title of Study: Bullying Prevalence in Mississippi: A Comparison of Urban and Rural Schools

Principal Investigator's Name: Valarie M. McCaskill

Liberty University  
Academic Department: Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study of the prevalence of bullying in Mississippi schools. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she attends one of the schools selected to be in the study. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to your child participating in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Valarie M. McCaskill, a student at Liberty University in the Education Department.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of bullying that exist in urban and rural school in Mississippi and to see if bullying is more prevalent at schools with bully prevention programs or school without bully prevention programs.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to your child participating in this study, we would ask your child to do the following things:

Complete an anonymous bully/victim questionnaire during their Character Education class with the school counselor.

Seal the surveys in envelopes provided after completion for confidentiality.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There will be minimal risk to the students who participate in the study because the students currently watch videos, complete surveys, and have class discussions about bullying often as a part of the Character Education class work. Therefore, the risk of this study is no more than what the participants will encounter during their regular class session.

The benefits to participation are:

Schools can be identified that have a high prevalence of bullying.

Schools may become aware of the fact that Bully Prevention programs may need to be implemented in their schools to combat the growing problem of bullying in American Schools.

### **Compensation:**

You or your child will not receive any payment to participate in this study. The counselor may elect to give the students a free homework pass for their participation.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. No names or any type of identification system will be utilized in the study. All research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will

have access to the records. The data from the study will be stored in a locked cabinet and will only be utilized for the purpose of this study. No one other than the researcher will view the data. The researcher will keep the data until the time limit required by the Internal Review Board (IRB) expires, then the data will be shredded and burned to maintain total confidentiality.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Valarie M. McCaskill. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to e-mail me at vmccaskill@liberty.edu You may also contact Dr. Shante' Austin by e-mail somoore@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent for my child to participate in the study.

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Numbers:** *(After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)*

**IRB Expiration Date:** *(After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)*

## **Assent of Child to Participate in a Research Study**

### **What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?**

Bullying Prevalence in Mississippi: A Comparison of Urban and Rural Schools

By: Valarie M. McCaskill

### **Why am I doing this study?**

I am interested in studying bullying at urban and rural schools in Mississippi. I also want to see if schools with bully prevention programs have less bullying than schools without bully prevention programs.

### **Why am I asking you to be in this study?**

You are being asked to be in this research study because bullying is not always reported to the office and to the principal; therefore, I want to hear from students directly to see if bullying is a problem at your school.

### **If you agree, what will happen?**

If you are in this study you will receive a survey to complete from the counselor. You will answer all questions truthfully; then, you will seal the survey in the provided envelope and return it to the counselor. You will not write your name or any identifying marks on the survey. The survey will remain anonymous.

### **Do you have to be in this study?**

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

### **Do you have any questions?**

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

---

Signature of Child

---

Date

**Researcher Contact Information: Valarie McCaskill: [vmccaskill@liberty.edu](mailto:vmccaskill@liberty.edu)**

**Dr. Shante' Austin: [somoore@liberty.edu](mailto:somoore@liberty.edu)**

Liberty University Institutional Review Board,  
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502  
or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

## Counselor's Recruitment Letter

Students, our school has been given permission to participate in a research study about the prevalence of bullying in Mississippi schools. This study involves bully/victim questionnaires which are a form of survey to detect if a school has a bully problem. The study is completely voluntary and only the students who want to participate and have their parents' permission can be in the study. No one will be forced to participate and no one will get mad at you if you choose not to participate.

All students participating in the study will be given a briefing before the survey is administered so that they have a clear understanding about the study and what will happen in the study.

Permission slips will be provide by the counselors' office and will list the deadline for the permission slips to be returned. We hope that everyone is allowed to participate in the study because it has the potential to help our school improve. Below is a description of what the study entails:

Receive permission from parent(s)

Students must sign an assent form

Students will complete a survey/questionnaire anonymously

Students will seal the surveys in an envelope provided for

The Counselors' Office

## Appendix B

### Raw Data

#### School Type to Victim

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
School Type * Victim	1765	100.0%	0	0.0%	1765	100.0%

#### School Type \* Victim Cross tabulation

Count

		Victim		Total
		Yes	No	
School Type	Urban	480	467	947
	Rural	415	403	818
Total		895	870	1765

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.000 <sup>a</sup>	1	.984	1.000	.511
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.000	1	.984		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	.000	1	.984		
N of Valid Cases	1765				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5.

**School Type \* Victim Cross tabulation**

		Victim		Total
		Yes	No	
	Count	480	467	947
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
	Urban			
	% within Victim	53.6%	53.7%	53.7%
School type	% of Total	27.2%	26.5%	53.7%
	Count	415	403	818
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
	Rural			
	% within Victim	46.4%	46.3%	46.3%
	% of Total	23.5%	22.8%	46.3%
	Count	895	870	1765
	% within School Type	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
Total	% within Victim	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%

**Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.000	.984
	Cramer's V	.000	.984
N of Valid Cases		1765	

## Self Identified Bullies

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
School Type * Self Identified Bullies	1765	100.0%	0	0.0%	1765	100.0%

**School Type \* Self Identified Bullies Cross tabulation**

Count

		Self Identified Bullies			Total
		Girls	Boys	Uninvolved	
School type	Urban	176	126	645	947
	Rural	139	124	555	818
	Total	315	250	1200	1765

**School Type \* Self Identified Bullies Cross tabulation**

		Self Identified Bullies			Total
		Girls	Boys	Uninvolved	
School type	Count	176	126	645	947
	% within School Type	18.6%	13.3%	68.1%	100.0%
	Urban % within Self Identified Bullies	55.9%	50.4%	53.8%	53.7%
School type	% of Total	10.0%	7.1%	36.5%	53.7%
	Count	139	124	555	818
	% within School Type	17.0%	15.2%	67.8%	100.0%
School type	Rural % within Self Identified Bullies	44.1%	49.6%	46.3%	46.3%
	% of Total	7.9%	7.0%	31.4%	46.3%
	Count	315	250	1200	1765
Total	% within School Type	17.8%	14.2%	68.0%	100.0%
	% within Self Identified Bullies	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	17.8%	14.2%	68.0%	100.0%

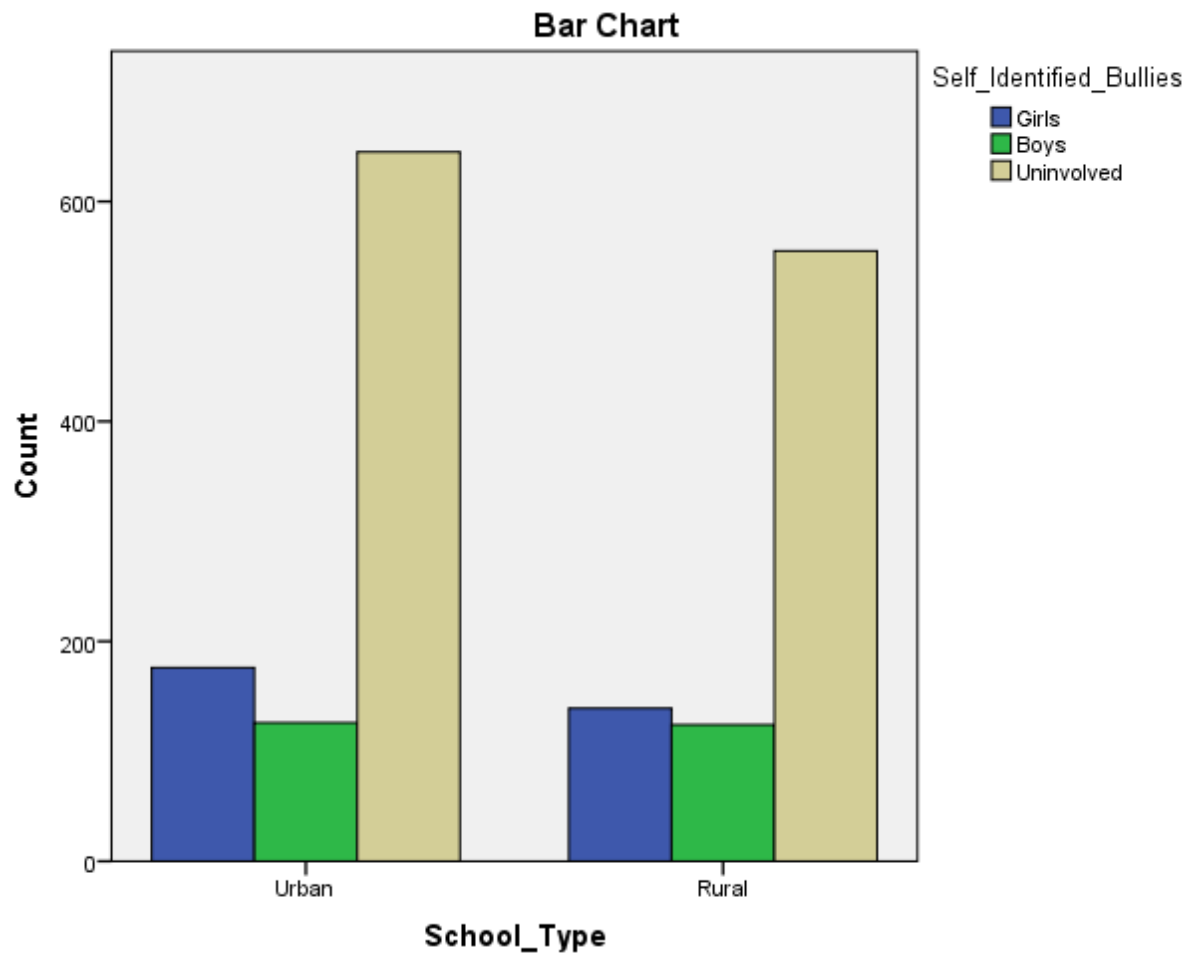
### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.693 <sup>a</sup>	2	.429
Likelihood Ratio	1.692	2	.429
Linear-by-Linear Association	.128	1	.720
N of Valid Cases	1765		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

### Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.031	.429
	Cramer's V	.031	.429
N of Valid Cases		1765	



## Schools with and without Bully Prevention Programs

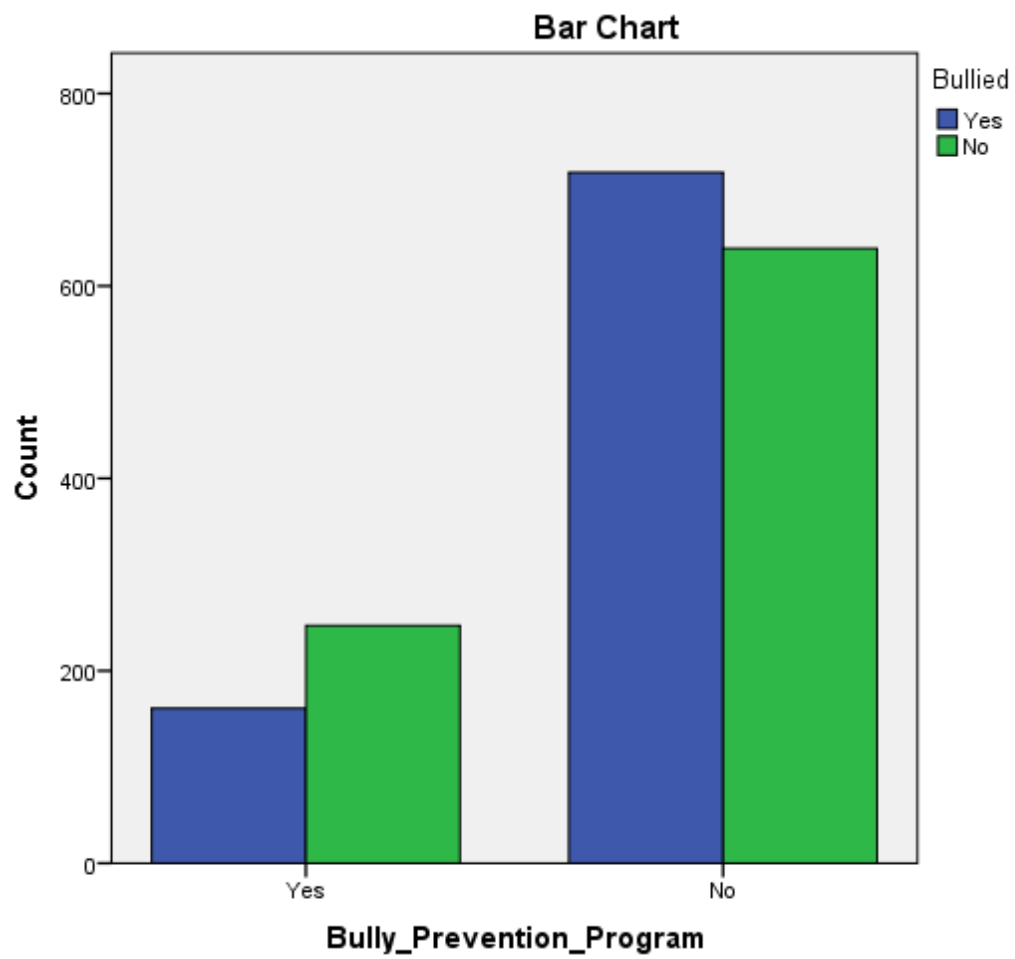
**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.699 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000	.000	.000
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	22.164	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	22.838	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.686	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	1765				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

**Bully\_Prevention\_Program \* Bullied Crosstabulation**

			Bullied		Total
			Yes	No	
Bully_Prevention_Program	Yes	Count	161	247	408
		% within	39.5%	60.5%	100.0%
		Bully_Prevention_Program			
		% within Bullied	18.3%	27.9%	23.1%
	No	Count	718	639	1357
		% within	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%
		Bully_Prevention_Program			
		% within Bullied	81.7%	72.1%	76.9%
Total		Count	879	886	1765
		% within	49.8%	50.2%	100.0%
		Bully_Prevention_Program			
		% within Bullied	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



**Appendix C**  
**IRB Approval**

**From:** IRB, IRB [[IRB@liberty.edu](mailto:IRB@liberty.edu)]

**Sent:** Monday, February 18, 2013 2:51 PM

**To:** McCaskill, Valarie

**Cc:** IRB, IRB; Austin, Shante Moore; Garzon, Fernando

**Subject:** IRB Approval 1513.021813: Bullying Prevalence in Mississippi: A Comparison of Urban and Rural Schools

Dear Valarie,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**

*Professor, IRB Chair*

**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**

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