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Peter Spezzano

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**THE FREQUENCY OF HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, AND BULLYING BY  
GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT COMPARED TO SPECIAL EDUCATION  
STUDENTS, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY INTERVENTION FOR AT  
RISK STUDENTS. ; ARE SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS MORE LIKELY  
TO BE INVOLVED IN HIB INCIDENTS THAN REGULAR UNCLASSIFIED  
STUDENTS?**

by  
Peter R. Spezzano

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Masters of Arts in School Psychology  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2012

Thesis Chair: Terri Allen, Ph.D.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Lisa, and two sons Vincent, and Giovanni.

Thank you for providing the support and motivation that allowed me to persevere.

To my professors in the classroom and out, thank you for guidance and patience through this process. You have illuminated the path, which I travel.

## **Abstract**

Peter Spezzano

THE FREQUENCY OF HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, AND BULLYING BY  
GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT COMPARED TO SPECIAL EDUCATION  
STUDENTS, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY INTERVENTION FOR AT  
RISK STUDENTS. ; ARE SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO  
BE INVOLVED IN H.I.B. INCIDENTS THAN REGULAR UNCLASSIFIED  
STUDENTS?

2011/2012

Terri Allen, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in School Psychology

This study intended to determine the pervasiveness of bullying among middle school students, and the relationship with special education classification. The sample population investigated was composed of 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school students. Archival data collected from four years of office disciplinary referrals provided the statistics to evaluate student classification and frequency of bullying. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted in order to examine the data. As hypothesized results revealed that there was a correlation between student special education classification and the rate of involvement in a bullying event. The research suggests that students classified as special education were found more often to be bully perpetrators.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### 1.1 Need for Study

In recent years the need and desire for research focused on harassment, intimidation, and bullying has increased in disciplines involving children. The recognition of HIB as a threat to our youth, has been highlighted by educators, families, media, and government (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). As tragic stories make headlines, the cry of society to impress new regulation echoes, and laws are passed. Current empirical research is necessary to further expand our current knowledge concerning the topic, and allow for society to implement the most practical measures. Increased action towards HIB is an undertaking that has been bestowed upon our schools and educators. It is a means of providing a safe and secure educational environment for our children. It is a primary goal of this research is to become more knowledgeable about the occurrence of HIB and to determine the most appropriate methods of reduction in school settings. In order to effectively approach such a task researchers must provide extensive evidence to support the action plans put in place.

As of late a spotlight has been shed on the topic of bullying in schools (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). State mandates grow teeth and professionals in the field of childcare scramble to initiate programs that address the issue of bullying. It is the role of responsible research to provide the backbone for action taken. Although much fieldwork has been collected over the past 40 years concentrated on HIB, the recent prevalence of the topic has intensified the need for research. The common goal of any

research conducted is to increase people's comprehension of HIB. In return this should provide decision makers with the knowledge that allows for more advantageous action to be taken in schools.

The schools impact of intervention is greatly dependent on selecting the appropriate candidate to receive the support (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen 2007). Those forming the new approach to handling HIB should be well equipped with knowledge on the population before forming a plan. Student body and class dynamics are an important characteristic to consider prior to establishing a plan of action. Public schools host a wide array of diversity in the realm of social, cultural, and academic skill and background. Of these differences one of the most highlighted and documented throughout school is the difference of classification. Being classified as regular education or special education is a well-documented separation in public schools.

## 1.2 Purpose

Throughout the duration of this research HIB will refer to harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The purpose of this study is to provide clear definitive comparison between the classifications of students whom are designated as the aggressor in a HIB incident. In order to narrow the scope of the topic, this study focused specifically on children in the public middle school setting. The researcher examined children involved in HIB incidents, and reviewed the characteristics of that specific child.

The motivation behind this approach was to provide information that will be useful in the coordination of relevant HIB programs. Knowing who may be more likely involved and where an incident will likely occur is valuable intelligence to a program that

endeavors to extinguish HIB behaviors. Rather than focusing on a particular intervention after an incident has occurred, this would allow for the incorporation of preventative measures.

This research was an attempt to focus in on these two separate classifications and their interaction with incidents of HIB. The determination of who is more probable to engage in bullying behaviors will lead to potential for preemptive reduction approaches or a more precise target for intervention. Revealing the individual who is at risk will lead school administrators to intervene with a bullying incident before it manifests.

### 1.3 Hypothesis

The hypothesis was students classified and eligible for special education are more likely to be identified as the “bully” in an incident, compared to regular education students.

### 1.4 Operational Definition

Recently many state mandates have launched to reduce the occurrence of HIB, in school settings. At the forefront of the effort to thwart HIB, is the state of New Jersey’s most recently adopted anti-bullying law. The law has been herald as one of the toughest in the nation, and considered a model that should be followed by other states. The description of HIB, which is used in this law, will be the description employed in this research.

New Jersey Statutory Definition (adopted January 2011; effective September 2011) "Harassment, intimidation or bullying" means any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it be a single incident or a series

of incidents, that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or off school grounds as provided for in section 16 of P.L.2010, c.122 (C.18A:37-15.3).

### 1.5 Assumptions

The researcher has the expectation that students within the pool of data have been appropriately classified as regular or special education by the cooperating school district. Another expectation is that all office discipline referral records being utilized are accurate and complete.

### 1.6 Summary

The purpose of this paper is to further investigate harassment, intimidation, and bullying, and the impact on students well being. Current up-to-date data is required and essential considering the present climate surrounding HIB. Research that can contribute to the overall understanding of the impact, origin, and general knowledge is valuable to anyone that endeavors to make a safer environment for children. The chapter to follow will focus specifically on current research and studies that concentrate on bullying. This will help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the motivation behind this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is recognized throughout the world that childhood and adolescence is a temperamental time period, which shapes the individual we ultimately become in adulthood. For the most part schools are revered as the institutions that hold the responsibility of fostering children through this stage of development (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011). It is within the confines of school that society entrusts their most prized possession, and the key for a successful future. The task of preparing and providing a safe nurturing environment is crucial to the impact on childhood development. There is however, a new variable that is gaining attention in the formula of where schools should focus their attention, energy, and resources. That variable is the significance of harassment, intimidation, and bullying in early childhood through adolescence. The following will be a review of bullying research, and how it correlates with the following study.

The majority of research on bullying has been conducted within the last 3 decades, and therefore lacks the thorough examination other educational topics have received (Losel & Bender, 2011). As research progresses more attention is paid to the prevalence of bullying in multiple venues, as well as the impact on those involved. Additionally with the increased awareness and media coverage of school violence, many have linked these types of events with incidents of bullying. The outcry for action against bullying has motivated researchers to take a closer look at the topic, and improve

the current data surrounding bullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010).

Although it may seem, according to the media, that bullying is an epidemic that is isolated to schools in the United States, the truth is, the behavior is exhibited at a similar frequency around the world (Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluga, & Ruan, 2004). This suggests that bullying is an event that transcends culture, and cannot be isolated to one specific society. The research, considered by many to be key in this field of study, was conducted by Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). His composition of research has not been isolated to one specific geographical region, but has cut across many different countries and cultures around the world.

In many cases such as Columbine, students capable of carrying out malicious acts of violence are not revealed until it is too late. Often the mental state of the individual is not unveiled until people ask the question, why did this happen. In many of these situations the individual's school and social history shows signs of depression and discontent. Many times the contention with social surroundings is at the root of the violent acts towards themselves or other individuals (Chaux, Molano, & Podlesky, 2009). If there is a true connection between school violence and depression or mental health, then it is imperative to consider the consequences of repeated bullying on an individual (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

While internationally bullying research has rapidly matriculated over the past thirty years, the United States has failed to keep pace with its counterparts (Nansel, Craig,

Overpeck, Saluga, & Ruan, 2004). A pivotal point in American history, as well as an influential factor in the increased need for the understanding of bullying came on April 20, 1999. Days and weeks after the incident at Columbine High school the nation came to see the perpetrators in a different light. Although they could be categorized as the assailants responsible for the devastation in a vicious act, many began to realize they had long been fulfilling the role of victim in their everyday school experience. This event, as it rightly should, shed new light on the significance and consequence of bullying in the United States. In a book titled *Bullying in American Schools: a social-ecological perspective on prevention* by Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer, suggest that while research conducted in other countries has been critical to our understanding of bullying and victimization among school-aged youth, the unique contexts which comprise U.S. schools argues for examination of this ubiquitous phenomenon (Espelage, Swearer, 2003).

Within the United States one of the most referenced large-scale studies was conducted in 2001 soon after the call to attention of school violence (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). The study of more than 15,000 students ranging from 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade evaluated the details compiled from American student surveys. Of the entire group 29.9% reported involvement in bullying events. The self-reporting bullying conduct was found in 13% of the students, 10.6% identified as the victim, and 6.3% identified as the bully-victim. The frequency of bullying was also reported to be higher in middle school than high school, and also higher in boys than girls. Being that the United States holds such a wide range of geographic regions this



study also took geography of the students into consideration. They found no difference in bullying across urban, suburban, and rural areas of the country. Although this research is considered one of the most important in the advancement of methodology to combat bullying in America, it still possesses limitations. One particular area of consideration is the process used to assess student bullying. Although considered a practical method to collecting data, relying solely on results collected from student self-assessment can be misleading due to variability of individual perceptions (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001).

Other studies conducted within the United States have found similar statistics of bullying in middle and high school settings (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). In a study of over 5,000 Massachusetts middle school and high school students a greater percentage of middle school students (26.8%) than high school students (15.6%) were categorized as victims of bullying, and for both groups of students, the percentage of victims was greater than the percentage of bullies (7.5% for middle school and 8.4 % for high school),(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009, p. 466).

Subsequently this study also found that the danger of suicide and depression are greater among bullies and victims, and among bullies alone there is an association of alcohol and drug use. This data represents one of the first documents related to specific state region, on wide array of risk factors associated with bullying in adolescent aged students. It is important to recognize the differences between states in America and the difference of laws and regulations regarding bullying in each area of the country. Although some research suggests that bullying statistics are comparable across the nation, it is important

to further investigate differences due to ulterior causes such as socio economic background (Chaux, Molano, & Podlesky 2009).

The acknowledgement of varying state regulation is especially apropos to the recent summons for bullying legislation in states such as New Jersey. Within the past year New Jersey has been titled, by many, to have the toughest laws against bullying in the nation (Hu, 2011, para. 5). Many in the state regard the death of Rutgers student, Tyler Clementi as a pivotal point in the push for new directive (Hu, 2011, para. 6). Public schools throughout the state have been handed guidelines that they must follow in order to; literally, meet the grade they will be awarded by the state. Proponents herald the new law, stating is about time. While others argue that the new legislation has gone to far, not giving schools enough resources to prepare staff and match requirements (Hu, 2011, para. 5). The law is another step in bringing the topic of bullying to dinner table discussions, and the center of attention. The aspect of the new bullying law that stands to have the most impact lies within the prevention of future bullying incidents. Schools will still be the determinants of the programs they initiate, and interventions they stand behind. The true influence will reside with the effectiveness of these tactics. While it is far too premature to determine the effect of the new legislation, it is predictable that other states will be following in New Jersey's footsteps.

## 2.2 Definitions

To this day the definition coined by Olweus is widely accepted through out the world of bullying research (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). In his literature, Olweus defines a bullying event as when an individual is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to

negative actions on the part of one or more other individuals (Olweus, 1993). When examined closely it is clear there lay three key components to this definition. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is characterized by undesired, negative behavior. It is also important to note that bullying requires a repeated pattern of behavior over time. Bullying involves an uneven balance of dominance or strength between two parties (Olweus, 1993). It is important to realize that each segment of this definition highlights a different characteristic of the bullying event.

### 2.3 The Bully

When attempting to conceptualize the image of a bully, it is difficult to avoid the stereotypical schoolyard character portrayed in movies, sitcoms, cartoons, etc. Normally these perpetrators are the hulking alpha male, inches taller than the rest of their counterparts, or the manipulative condescending female huddled in the schoolyard with her entourage. While it is important to realize the danger of stereotypes, it is hard to deny the fact that some of these repeated images are often supported in bully research. In some cases it has been found in male bully data, that there is a direct correlation between the size of the bully and the students subjected to the bullying (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011). Many times it is also found that in female bullying data that the individual responsible for the bullying holds some type of social or psychological power over their victim (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). Although both examples may seem like the typical bully stereotype, modern research and observation can defend these claims. In the same breath it is critical to be

aware bullies may come in many shapes and sizes. When labeling an individual as a bully it is essential to have standard set of descriptors that help identify the behavior. Some of the widely accepted attributes of a bully show that the negative behavior is repeated over time, and exhibits a power differential between the parties involved (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). This domination can be associated to mental or physical strength, and can also be compounded by the reaction or non-responsiveness of others surrounding the incident (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008)..

When determining the traits that separate bullies from other students it is necessary to mention the aggressive behavior that often accompanies the bullying. Roland and Idsoe (2001) confirmed that individual aggressiveness was strongly related to bullying others. Their study took a more in depth look at the aggressiveness found in bullying. The two categories of aggression classified by the researchers were labeled proactive and reactive aggressiveness. Proactive aggression is planned and intentionally predacious, where as reactive is typically a fear based swift reaction to any type of threat (Roland, & Idsoe, 2001). In the study conducted by Roland and Idsoe (2001) they found that within bullies the proactive aggressive behavior increase from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and decreases within victims during the same time period. This could be used to illustrate the escalation in aggressive attacks on victims and the submissive unassertive behavior that is often elicited by the victim.

## 2.4 The Victim

In regards to the victims of bullying, there has been much more research analyzing the mental and physical impacts as a result of being subjected to repeated bullying events. Conditions such as severe anxiety, depression, insecurity, and low self-esteem are classic characteristics elicited by victims of bullying (Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2011). In many cases these students are withdrawn from social interaction and often found on the outside looking in. School can be a challenging and unpleasant venue to say the least for these individuals. Commonly, avoidance and poor attendance reveals the attempt to avoid mental or physical abuse by a bully or bullies (Olweus, 1993). Additionally sub-groups of this role, such as passive and submissive victims, have also been cataloged as key identifiers in the bullying process (Olweus, 1997). As in the case of the bully, stereotypical images can hold some validity. For example, it has been shown that in male bullying encounters, the victim is commonly less physically developed. In early research by Dan Olweus, it was found if the victims are boys, they are likely to be physically weaker than the other boys in general (Olweus, 1995).

It is also important to highlight the distinction between passive and provocative victims. Provocative victims differ from passive victims in that they usually provoke an attack, are easily provoked, may retaliate when attacked, and often complain about being attacked (Olweus, 1993). These individuals many times inadvertently say or do something that pressures the bully to react. Passive victims tend to dislike themselves

and desire to stay home from school (for the sake of physical safety) (Berthold & Hoover, 2000). Ordinarily passive victims remain aloof and detached from the social group (Olweus, 1997).

Being bullied can be manifested in different forms. A simple way to classify the difference is determining if the bullying is direct or indirect. Being confronted head on is an example of direct bullying (Olweus, 1993). For instance, a student who is physically assaulted on the playground or at the bus stop each day would be a victim of direct bullying. Typically these events are physical and aggressive in nature, and involve a victim who is physically deficient or weaker (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). In these instances it is clear to see the power differential that is highlighted in the classic definition of bullying. On the other hand, indirect bullying may come in the form of rumors or gossip that has malicious intent (1993, Olweus). Unfortunately with the rise of social networking systems, so is the occurrence of indirect bullying. This type of bullying is undoubtedly becoming a more prevalent form of harassment, and a challenging behavior to detect. Some research has revealed a difference in gender between direct and indirect bullying. Olweus (1993) for example, reported that girls were more likely than boys to experience indirect forms of bullying. Boys reported more physical bullying, and girls reported more indirect bullying. As technology in our lives increases exponentially each year it is possible that the data concerning this assumption has changed. In today's population of youth it is apparent that social networking and communication through alternative sources is

universal between male and female (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). The task of detecting this indirect form of bullying via technology is daunting at the least. This increase of technology should not be reason to limit children's exposure or access, but should encourage administrators to apply early intervention programs to reduce the prevalence of bullying altogether.

Victims can be associated with varying risk factors such as depression, suicide, and anxiety. Victims of bullying have a tendency to internalize the mental anguish they are subjected to on a regular basis (Gibb, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2011). It has been shown in research that being victimized in bullying events can predict later issues with mental health. Not only exposure to physical violence, but also peer rejection predicts later anxiety and depression (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, & Ribeaud). The effect that bullying has on victims has been well documented, and continues to be explored. The impact of repeated exposure to bullying might not be immediate or identifiable. The most common way to protect children from the adverse effects and risks associated with bullying is by taking preventative measures, and applying intervention programs (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). In some cases the consequence and impact on an individual may not be fully recognized until it is too late.

## 2.5 The Bully/Victim

Recent research has distinguished yet another important identifiable role in bullying process. A person described as a bully/victim has been both the perpetrator

and target of bullying (Olweus, 1993). These children have at some point fallen into either category. A situation where a child inadvertently does something to draw negative attention to themselves and therefore is ridiculed and bullied, in return lashes out at another person who may not have had any role in the initial bullying. This is an example of a bully/victim situation. This group is also at risk of being impacted by the various negative results on an individual. Not only are they at risk of factors associated with being the bully, but also the victim. Being the aggressor and also victimized, the bully/victim demonstrates high levels of both aggression and depression, and score low on measures of academic competence, prosocial behavior, and self esteem (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, Reijneveld 2011).

In a study conducted by Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, and Reijneveld investigated the impact of preschool behaviors, family characteristic, and parental mental health on bullying and victimization at age 11 and 14. The study found that early childhood anxiety decreased the likelihood of being a bully/victim at age 10/11. One could hypothesize that the anxiety of these children makes it very unlikely for them to become a bully at that age, even in case of victimization (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, Reijneveld, 2011). The study revealed that preschool behavior, emotional, and family characteristics impact the chances of involvement in bullying later in life. The significance of the research should lead toward the assumption that early intervention is key in preventing the amount of bullying in all settings. The question has arisen with the distinction of this subgroup, of what amount of the whole



do bully/victims represent (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). This question is valid to ask, considering this subgroup is treated as a separate category from the bully or the victim. Also with this comes implications of treatment within intervention programs and how much attention and resources would be needed to help this subset of the population. Thusfar prevalence of the bully/victim group has varied greatly (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007.) Research indicates that this subgroup does not represent a large portion of population, although findings show that the prevalence of bully/victims is higher with boys than girls (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). It is critical to recognize this subgroup within the bullying event, and be aware that they fulfill a separate criteria, and therefore require specific attention, and possibly interventions.

## 2.6 The Group Process

While it is important to be able to categorize and label specific characters in a bullying event, it is equally important to view the entire event as a group process that has several different active participants. A study conducted in Finland points out that bullying behavior should be regarded as a function of certain characteristics of the bully, victim, or bully/victim within the process involving a whole group (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen, 1996). The leading purpose of this research was to find if group members other than the bully and victim had an impact on a bullying incident. The assumption was that even though these members do not appear to have an active role, they still remain an intricate part of the process. The study found that 87% of students fell into a participant role labeled as outsider,

reinforcer to the bully, or defender of the victim (Salmivalli, et al., 1996). One interesting aspect of this study is found in the discussion of the defender. In a survey completed by students regarding their personal perception of peers, defenders of the victim received the highest status among fellow students. These individuals were looked up to after others had taken notice of their actions (Salmivalli, et al., 1996). It is possible to assume that a more proactive student body would have influence on reducing bullying incidents. Schools need to foster the character of the defender, and highlight the qualities other students idolize. One way to do this is by creating a school environment that fosters a feeling of true community (Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002). If students have real concern for the welfare of other individuals, then they will also be more likely to step up and defend that person when the moment arises. It is necessary to recognize bullying as an event that involves more than just the victim and bully, and the importance that people outside can have on the outcome.

The numbers reflected by each role are fairly consistent regardless where the data has been collected. A study conducted in 2004 set out to expand the understanding of bullying in schools by collecting data from 25 different countries around the world (Nansel, et al., 2004). On average, across countries, 11% of children fell in the 'victim' group, 10% fell in the 'bully' group, 6% fell in the bully/victim group, and the remaining 73% students were not involved in bullying. In other words, a quarter of students in a given school are directly involved in bullying. The revealing statistics reporting involvement in bullying incidents were also found to be correlated

with the likelihood of physical, social, or emotional problems, therefore impacting overall school success (Nansel, Craig, Saluja, Ruan, & Health Behavior in School-aged Children Bullying Analyses Working Group, 2004). The significance of this particular research leads to an understanding that bullying is an issue that deserves attention regardless your geographic or political location. Considering that such a high percentage of the general population is exposed to this occurrence, there are implications for further research based on academic and social success. There are few problems in school that effect such a large population and go unaddressed. It is pertinent that schools around the country are continuously passing legislation to confront the issue.

## 2.7 Detrimental Effect on the Victim

The question that has arisen with greater focus on school bullying is what are the short and long-term effects that accompany being involved in regular occurring bullying incidents. Present findings suggest a strong correlation between long-term undesirable health outcomes and school bullying (Losel, Bender, 2011). It is important to understand all of the effects bullying can have on an individual when considering the interventions exercised. When a child is subjected to constant bullying their mental and physical well-being are at risk. In some cases the stress and anxiety of the experience can have lasting long-term effects on the individual (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, Ribeaud, 2011). Issues with self-esteem, depression, and anxiety are just some of the observed symptoms displayed by victims of repeated bullying. On the contrary, bullies often are reported to

have higher rates of drug and alcohol use, fighting, and overall riskier health behaviors (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2011). The persistence of bullying is a threat to the health of our current youth, as well as their progression and development into adulthood.

Unfortunately for those targeted in these events, the incidents are rarely isolated. Due to the impact bullying may have on an individual, research has taken a closer look at the physical and psychological symptoms associated with bullying (Pernille, et al. 2005). In 2005 the European Journal of Public Health published a study that focused on the frequency of bullying in 28 different countries and the connection to physical and psychological symptoms. This study focused on the implication that being bullied would have a recognizable adverse effect on the child's physical health. Symptoms related to being bullied considered in the study included headaches, stomachache, backache, and dizziness (Due et al., 2005). Psychological symptoms ranged from sleeping issues, bad temper, nervousness, tiredness, loneliness, helplessness, and feeling low (Due et al., 2005). The conclusion to this research found that students involved in bullying showed consistent, strong and graded association with each of 12 different physical and psychological symptoms in all countries (Due et al., 2005). Regardless of the country, bullying was evident, and related to an unfavorable result on the child's health. Studies like these not only reveal the broad expanse of bullying and universality across cultures, but more importantly the lasting negative impact on physical and mental health. The results also exhibit the necessity for schools around the world to take proactive steps in reducing the frequency of bullying incidents.

A Chilean study conducted by Fleming & Jacobson (2008) using 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students attempted to look at bullying as a significant cause to childhood depression. After the surveying of 8,131 middle school students the researchers found pertinent information correlating the involvement of bullying and symptoms of depression. The study found symptoms of depression were more commonly associated with students that had experienced bullying compared to those that had not. Reported levels of sadness/hopelessness and other symptoms of depression increased with a greater number of reported days of bullying over the course of a month. This study also found that being bullied is associated with an increased likelihood of suicidal ideation and planning for suicide (Fleming, Jacobsen, 2008). Health risks based on physical aspects rather than mental well-being were also evaluated. The study examined the use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sexual activity, and physical fighting as some of the examples of physical health risks assessed. Students who participated and reported being bullied were found more likely to report negative health behaviors such as smoking, drinking, physical fights and drug use (Fleming, Jacobsen, 2008). The study of Chilean children brings some interesting evidence of the health related effects caused by bullying..

Other studies have specified the health effects in the area of anxiety and depression (Gibb, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2011). A common thread in the instances of adolescent suicide is often the presence of issues with anxiety and depression. Many researchers in the field of bullying take this as a cue to further research on the topic of depression, anxiety, and bullying (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2011).

In a recent study researchers looked at the association between bullying

victimization at age 8 and levels of depression and anxiety 3 years later at age 11 (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2011). The data in this study was collected using a bullying self report scale developed by Olweus. The scale included support using pictures to clarify questions presented to the children. The scale covered 4 different types of bullying: teasing, stealing and destroying possessions, physical violence, and rejection. The intensity of the bullying was also determined by rating the frequency of the bullying incident each week. The results yielded data showing rejection and teasing to be the most common form of bullying. The least frequent form of bullying was theft or destroying possessions. Follow up found that the location of these events was most often in school or on school premises, and 46% happening in the school yard. In respect to the levels of anxiety and depression, reports were composed from child, teacher, and parent observation. Teacher and child description of the child's behavior were in line with each other, while parent's description varied. It is very possible that the location and context in which parents witness their own children is the cause of this disparity. In conclusion this study revealed different measures of bullying victimization at age 8 significantly predicted anxiety and depression at age 11. Not only bullying frequency, but also the variety (number of different types of bullying) played a role, and not only victimization of physical violence, but also peer rejection predicted later anxiety and depression (Averdijk, Muller, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2011).

## 2.8 Detrimental Effect on the Bully

While these studies provide useful information on the influence of bullying on health, it was limited to the repercussions felt by victims in the incident. It is not to be

assumed that victims are the only constituents effected in the bullying process. Although the results are often more convenient to sympathize with, the bully or bystander may also experience some distress or effect on health (Gibb, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2011). The goal of reducing bullying should be carried out with the intention of helping all children involved in the process.

Besides causing damage to those victimized, new research is suggesting that this bullying behavior is a predictor of poor academic achievement, drug abuse, mental health concerns, and delinquent behavior (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). This helps to classify the bully into a group that would be considered at-risk, which is all the more reason to institute a system of prevention in schools. In a 30-year longitudinal study by Gibb, Horwood, and Fergusson beginning in 1977, reports of bullying perpetration in childhood were associated with higher rates of later mental health/adjustment problems (Gibb, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2011). Mental health issues ranged from later depression to emotional instability, as well as a separation from peers in social contexts. Substance abuse is also a detrimental form of misconduct commonly found to coincide with children that bully. In a report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), data was collected to help identify a broad range of risk factors suspected to be associated with bullying among middle and high school students. Not only did the data show substantial prevalence of middle and high school students associated or involved in a bullying event, but also associations between violent family encounters (i.e., being harmed physically or viewing violence from family), individual association with drug and alcohol use, and risk for depression and suicide (Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, 2011, p. 468). Generally speaking this and many other studies have highlighted the mental and physical health risks encountered by the individual who is bullying others. It is a common mistake to focus on the individual victimized by the event, but it should be noted that in preventing bullying there are benefits for all sides.

Bullying is an event in which there are several groups involved as well as effected by the process (Farrington, Loeber, Stallings, & Ttofi, 2011). The cause and effects are under regular examination by researchers in the field mental health. The potential health risks are inevitable when a child is subjected to regular physical and or mental stress (Farrington, Loeber, Stallings, & Ttofi, 2011). Often individuals tend to focus on this aspect of the bullying process, but we should not lose sight on the entire group of participants, including the perpetrator of bullying. Although at times more difficult to empathize with from a personal perspective, the bully is also endanger of specific health outcomes (Farrington, Loeber, Stallings, & Ttofi, 2011). Research that is able to analyze all facets of bullying will ultimately be more constructive in determining how to reduce the frequency of events.

While looking at a cluster of German students, in a longitudinal study over the course of five years, several interesting findings were reported. The study by Losel and Bender (2011), relied on report and observations of bullying and from children as well as mother's assessment on bullying and victimization. They utilized questionnaires, behavior observations, cognitive tests, home visit interviews, teacher's ratings, and pediatric files when collecting data. Data resulting in rates students were exposed or



involved in bullying events, mimicked the findings of many other studies (Losel, & Bender, 2011). The rate of victimization around age 13 was approximately 15%, which is similar to other findings involving similarly aged children. One important aspect of this study was the longitudinal design that included a follow up of nearly five years later. This was vital in determining the impact that bullying had on the bully's later mental health. The findings of this study revealed the following: bullying perpetration was a highly significant predictor of later antisocial and delinquent outcomes in adolescence (Losel, Bender, 2011). One consideration to make in this particular study is the difference in findings between male and female. Data suggested being a male bully had little link to mental health issues such as anti-sociality or emotional distress (Losel, Bender, 2011). However, female bullies were found to more likely have an impact on later emotional problems. The bullying perpetration yet still acted as a potential predictor of aggressive/delinquent behavior, and anxious depressed mood in both groups. Again it is important to note that these findings showed a higher relevancy for females than males (Losel, Bender, 2011). Implications of this study suggest the need for more thorough examination of genders impact on bullying.

## 2.9 Link to Special Education

A recent study conducted by Rose, Espelage, and Monda through the department of special education at the University of Illinois, revealed several connections between the rate of bullying and special education. The study focused on middle school and high school students with classified disabilities, and their involvement in bullying events.

These students were monitored according to the frequency of being the victim as well as the aggressor. The hypothesis that special education students would be more frequently involved in bullying incidents was supported by the findings. The study provided clear evidence that students with disabilities are victimized more and display more fighting behaviors and bullying perpetration than students who are enrolled in general education (Rose, Espelage, Monda, 2009).

While similar research over recent years has provided equivalent results, a contrary study compiled by Norman White through the St. Louis University in 2008 stated special education placements nor poor academic achievement predicted bullying or serious delinquency in students (White, 2008).

Over the past several decades school systems across the country have begun to adapt to meet the needs of a diverse and ever changing student population. In addition, legislature has mandated a higher level of inclusion despite individual mental and physical abilities (Pivik, Mccomas, & Laflamme, 2002). When determining how to combat bullying in schools, it is important to recognize the diversity and composition of the school environment. While each public school is not a perfect reflection of the next, there are certain elements that will be similar throughout. One of the common traits through society as well as public schools is the attendance and incorporation of students with disabilities. When discussing bullying it is important to recognize all groups within the general population, such as mentally or physically disabled individuals (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). Due to the more recent attention to bullying, little research has been compiled on the interaction with disabled

populations. One particular study found that victimization rates exceeded 50% in several disabled student populations (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). As stated in the regulations of The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), equal educational opportunity should be provided to all students. Within this category is the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. It is important to recognize that within a general school population the students with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. Regardless of how challenging it may seem, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) states that students with disabilities are given the same opportunities to succeed. This component of educating students with disabilities should be recognized in the academic as well as the social aspects of school.

The question is how does bullying impact the disabled segment of the student body. Through research and examination some researchers have accumulated data showing a higher prevalence of bullying incidents with students that have disabilities (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). The reasoning for these findings are not always transparent. Clouding the issue of how to analyze bullying within disabled students is that each schools class structure and student placement differs. The key point of the little research generated reveals students with disabilities have shown to have a greater likelihood of being bullied than their classmates without disabilities (Pivik, McComas, & LaFlamme, 2002). This is crucial, considering the student with a disability is already at risk in many other regards.

Another important aspect of exploring bullying and special education students is

determining not only their involvement as a victim, but also as a perpetrating bully. Although few empirical studies have examined bullying perpetration and victimization rates among American schoolchildren with disabilities, international research has indicated that students who are enrolled in special education curricula are the perpetrators and victims of bullying more than their general education peers (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). On the contrary, some results have shown that special education placement does not predict bullying or negative peer associations (Hamarus, & Kaikkonen, 2008). In this study by Hamarus & Kaikkonen (2008), a more significant predictor of bullying was found to be early childhood aggression, rather than special educational placement, therefore supporting the need for early interventions. (Hamarus, & Kaikkonen, 2008). The outcomes do imply that a true predictor may lie in the within the specific disability rather than the educational classification. Although this presents conflicting outcomes on special education and bullying, the contrasting results justify the need for further research on the topic.

Special education classifications vary, as well as the disabilities that these students possess. Specifically, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is one of the most frequently labeled behavioral issues in children, and can affect interaction and relations between parents and peers (Holmberg, & Hjern, 2008). Evidence suggests that children diagnosed with ADHD are 3 times more likely to be labeled as an active bully, and reported being bullied 10 times more often as other children (Holmberg, & Hjern, 2008). Research conducted by Holmberg, & Hjern (2008) provoke contemplation of appropriate treatment strategies for children diagnosed with ADHD, as well as other potential

behavioral diagnoses that can be associated with bullying.

The information presented gives a foundation for understanding bullying and its effect on education, health, and development. Recent attention focused on harassment, intimidation, and bullying have prompted researchers to shed more light on the topic. At the same moment the lack of substantial information concerning the true nature of bullying events and the impact on education, children, and society has unveiled the need for more extensive research. The results of this research will provide further insight as to the connection between bullying and the educational framework.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

This section will be a description of the methodology used in this research. The description of participants, materials, design, and process will be outlined accordingly.

#### **3.1 Participants**

The data examined in the research was collected from accumulated archival data belonging to a 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade Southern New Jersey middle school. The information gathered was retrieved from district computer files, and includes 4 years worth of teacher documented disciplinary referrals. Participants included 48 students, 32 of which were male, and 16 female. The educational classification of regular education or special education was also considered. 31 students in the analysis were regular education, and 17 were classified as special education. The date of information was compiled from 2008 to 2012.

#### **3.2 Materials**

The material included archival data from the school district disciplinary database. The day of the offense, office disciplinary referrals were turned in to the school disciplinarian and individually loaded into the system. This data was then evaluated and decided whether a harassment, intimidation, or bullying event had occurred. It is important to note that the ODR forms completed had an area for description of the event, as well as an indicator to identify the type of infraction. Statistical analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS. Once data was coded and entered it was evaluated through testing available using SPSS computer software.

### 3.3 Design

It is imperative to discuss the two independent variables within this study. The independent variables are in association with each student's educational classification. The two categories of classification were regular or special education. Any student that is offered specially designed instruction due to a diagnosed disability is considered special education. The educational classification information was accessed through previous child study team IEP and 504 documentation. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted in order to examine this data. The dependant variable within this study was the frequency of bullying event. This information was accessed through office disciplinary referral forms collected and documented in the district database. Each individual event accompanied a detailed descriptive of the event, and the potential classification of harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

### 3.4 Procedure

Information was collected through office disciplinary referrals accumulated over four years. The researcher evaluated data from each year identifying the incidents in which harassment, intimidation, or bullying occurred. Special attention was also paid to the student's classification as regular education or special education.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The following chapter provides results relevant to the frequency of bullying among special education students compared to regular education students. The data was collected from office disciplinary referrals from the 2008-2009 school year to third marking period of 2012. A total of 48 students were analyzed from grades 5 through 8, 32 were male and 16 were female. The study consisted of 17 classified special education students, and 31 regular education students.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted in order to examine office disciplinary referrals collected over the course of four years. There were two independent variables within this study. The independent variables are in association with student's educational classification. The two categories of classification were regular or special education. Other categories examined, not pertaining to the hypothesis of the study, were gender and location of incident. The dependant variable assigned to this study was the frequency of the bullying referrals.

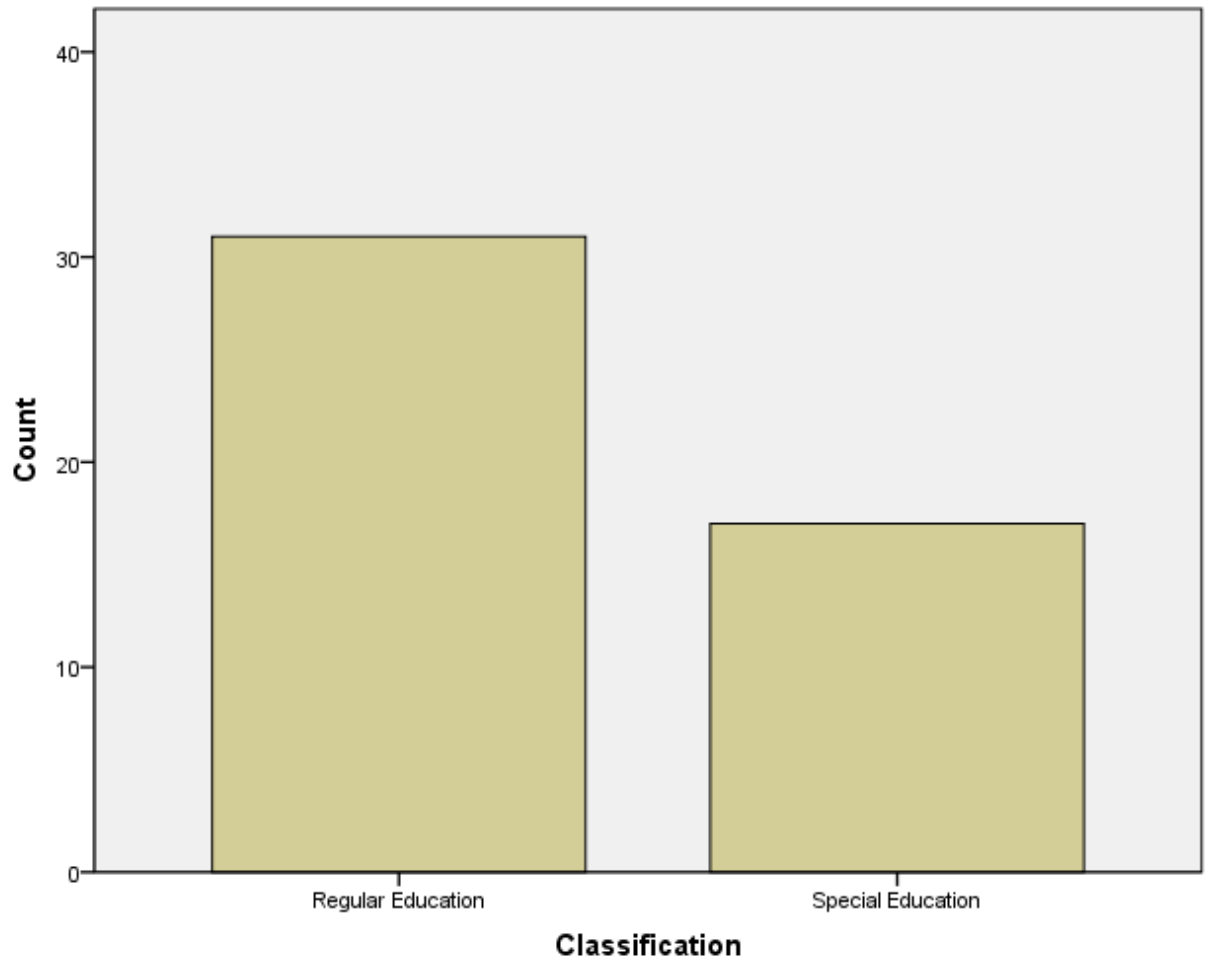
The hypothesis of this study is that the research will show classified students have a higher frequency of assuming the role of bully in a bullying incident, then regular education students (See Table 1). The analysis of variance revealed that for this population, special education classification was significant when comparing disciplinary referrals for bullying,  $F(1, 44) = 8.788, p > 0.005$  (See Figure 1).

Additional analysis was conducted where gender was examined, and was not significant. There was no significance found between gender and classification.



*Table 1 - Analysis of Variance between classification, gender, and classification combined with gender.*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Classification	1.981	1	1.981	8.788	.005
Gender	.016	1	.016	.073	.789
Classification * Gender	.189	1	.189	.840	.365



*Figure 1. Frequency of bullying comparison between regular education students and special education students.*

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Implications and findings of the present study are critical to the school environment established and overall student well being. The general intention of this study was to display a connection between bullying in schools, and the educational classification of students. The hypothesis states that bullying is more prevalent with the label and classification of special education. The information accumulated was generated from a four-year collection of middle school office disciplinary referrals. As stated previously, the data analysis reveals a significant correlation between the student classification and involvement in bullying events. It was found that special education students were more often implicated in bullying events.

Other relationships that have been previously noted between specific populations and bullying were not recognized. For instance, in previous research it has been stated that the male population is more frequently involved in bullying events recorded within a school (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). Although unrelated to the purpose of this study, analysis did not reveal any significance of bullying frequency compared to gender.

Reasoning behind this may have been due to inadequate data available for analysis. The school examined had a smaller student body compared to other public middle schools. The lack of subjects most likely produced insufficient amounts of data to explore. With an increased sample population the significance or insignificance may have more powerful meaning. Although it is important to realize that regardless the small sample size results predicting relationships among classification still held true. It

may be suggested that because small population had no impact on altering this significance, that it has strengthened the result of classifications compared with bullying.

Another limitation, within this study, is the measure of bullying incidence. The office disciplinary referral is a document that is completed by the observing teacher or staff member. The document is a template with choice and options in order to categorize the event taken place. The issue here may lie within the subjectivity of the tool. This measure is lacking inter-rater reliability. The perception of the staff member is the chronologist in this case, and may be affected by many alternative variables. For instance, did the staff member see the entire event unfold, do they have a personal bias, and did they misidentify an individual? Many factors can play a role in the recording of a bullying event. Also, do all staff members agree on the definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying? Do they fear retribution for using this type of label? Many questions may be asked of the process involved in the disciplinary documentation.

The span of four years, which the data was generated, should also be considered. In New Jersey the past two years have been a buzz of legislation, regulation, and documentation surrounding harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The law has improved and fortified the current definition of bullying. Has this law had an affect on the teachers, or additionally the students? Staff members see the hype in the media, and concern of administration surrounding this topic. Could this potentially skew the numbers of bullying events recorded? It is important to note that interpretation of HIB events may have also been altered through the course of time. The definition of HIB in accordance to the state of New Jersey has not necessarily been the previously accepted

definition. New perceptions of HIB may have an impact on the use of the office disciplinary referral. All of these are questions that should be further assessed for future research.

It is apparent through the results of this study that special education is a strong indicator for bullying perpetration. Looking deeper into the event, and further meticulous examination of the event should be considered. As the individual incident is examined significant attention should be paid to the special education student involved. Is there the possibility that these students are written up more often, because they are more likely to be caught? Maybe students who are less perceptive of their surroundings are less likely to suppress the impulse to react. Is there a potential catalyst that typically goes unnoticed by the observer of the event?

Additionally research focused on the individual disabilities possessed by special education students in order to determine a correlation between bullying and specific conditions, would be beneficial. The specific disability may also have an impact on the degree or involvement in HIB (Rose , Espelage, & Monday-Amaya, 2009). Special education classification holds a wide array of disabilities that impact a child's learning. It has been found that students with high incidence disabilities (i.e., learning disability, mild learning difficulties, emotional and behavioral difficulties) are involved in bullying less than students with more severe disabilities (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). Distinguishing the students with higher likelihood of bullying assists the implementation of prevention programs.

A specific limitation of this study was the lack of information collected pertaining

to the victim. The office disciplinary referral does not include a place to label victims of the event. The documents used are specific to the perpetrator of the event. Increased diligence in record keeping and documentation is a consideration for a more complete illustration of the bullying event. It is important to look at all aspects of the incidence in order to better more fully understand the cause and effect of bullying.

The results of this research help build a stronger case for taking a deeper look at our special education population. The data undeniably suggests a danger for our classified youth, and for the entire school climate (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). The students who have proven to be more involved in bullying behaviors additionally have an uphill climb in other areas of education (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). A fair and equal education is unlikely without addressing the concerns relating to prominence in bullying behavior.

Improvements within school systems, where students spend most of their day, provides the need for further research in order to provide great changes. The challenge of ensuing research is to look at not only who is the perpetrator of bullying, but also how we can help them stop. As data further defines the groups that are affected and those considered perpetrators, the focus should be on prevention of the event. By identifying the students who are most at-risk, interventions will be proactive, rather than reactive. It is a consensus that the effects of bullying are detrimental to our youth, the real test is to determine how schools can put an end to the damaging results.

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