

## PATTERNS OF BULLYING/VICTIMIZATION AMONG STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

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### Session Overview

#### Abstract

The purpose of this workshop is to demonstrate the use of a bullying instrument to establish a baseline of behavior among students and a program's response. Students with emotional disturbance (ED) in grades 6 through 10 attending therapeutic day schools completed the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. Their responses were compared to typical peers from a national sample. Students with ED were less likely to engage in bullying behavior. Although among their typical peers where boys had higher levels of bullying than girls, among students with ED, both boys and girls reported similar rates of bullying, used nonphysical means to bully, and reported occurrences to school authorities. Significantly more girls with ED were victims of bullying. Using these results as a baseline, consideration of the implications for practice and research will be encouraged among participants.

#### Background

Several studies have documented the pattern of bullying/victimization among students with disabilities, but little attention has been paid to identifying these patterns among students with Emotional Disturbance (ED). The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire was administered to students with ED attending private therapeutic day schools in New Jersey. The anonymous responses of the ED students were compared to findings from Nansel et. al. (2001), who analyzed data on typical peers from the World Health Organization's (1997-1998) Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey (HBSC).

The study was conducted by ASAH (formerly the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped), an organization of 92 private approved schools. All 31 schools serving students with ED were invited to participate, and 17 member schools volunteered to administer the Olweus instrument to students in grades 6-10. The principal investigator is employed by one of the participating schools. Appropriate releases were obtained.

The study was conducted, in part, to help establish the baseline for bullying/victimization among students with ED in therapeutic day schools. Students with ED as well as the professionals working with them benefit from such an effort, since programs serving students with ED will be better able to develop evidenced-based programs to prevent/intervene in bullying/victimization.

Because students with ED share traits associated with those involved in bullying/victimization, such as poor school performance, troubled interpersonal relationships, inappropriate behavior/feelings, and depression and

anxiety, we anticipated that students with ED would have a greater tendency/vulnerability than the typical students as bullies or victims.

Results indicated that the rates of bullying among students with ED were lower than those of their typical peers; girls with ED bullied at higher rates than their typical peers and at rates matching boys with ED; girls with ED were victimized at significantly higher rates than their typical peers or boys with ED.

Programs serving students with ED, especially girls, will be able to develop knowledge-based interventions. Small school size, close supervision, and the characteristics of the schools in this study appear to help curtail bullying. Girls with ED are often in the minority within programs, but have distinct needs for prevention and intervention. Further research is needed.

## **Workshop Summary**

This workshop will focus on the results of a study to identify baseline patterns of bullying/victimization among students with ED who attend therapeutic day schools. Presenters will discuss the study's methods and significant results, including gender issues. The implications for developing bullying prevention/intervention programs will be highlighted. Relevant avenues for further research will be explored.

## **Workshop Goals**

Participants will gain knowledge of the patterns of bullying/victimization among students with ED as compared to typical students. Particular focus will be placed on gender differences. Participants will plan for the assessment of bullying or similar behaviors at their sites to establish a baseline. During small group discussion, participants will be encouraged to generate/share ideas for the development of bullying prevention/intervention programs or further research for their students or target population.

## **Workshop Objectives**

1. To demonstrate the use of a bullying questionnaire to establish a baseline of behaviors in a school setting.
2. To familiarize participants with the similarities/differences between students with ED and typical students in regard to patterns of bullying/victimization.
3. To sensitize participants to the gender issues among students with ED in regard to bullying/victimization.
4. To stimulate ideas for developing future bullying prevention/intervention programs based on study results.
5. To stimulate interest in conducting further studies about students with ED and bullying/victimization.

## **Workshop Activities**

1. 20-25 minute presentation by Dr. Kellner and Dr. Carran describing the study's method, design, results, and limitations
2. 5-10 minute question and answer period
3. 25 minute break-out groups to discuss relevant ideas for program development and future research
4. 25-minute period for each small group to summarize discussion and share with all participants
5. 10-minute question and answer period

## **Assessment**

Indicators of success for this workshop will be measured through observation and discussion with workshop participants and through the formal and/or informal feedback that they provide. At the end, participants will be asked to complete an evaluation form (attached). The indicators are as follows:

1. Participants will demonstrate an understanding of the workshop content and have an opportunity to ask questions of the presenters that will enhance their understanding of and ability to utilize the study findings in future prevention/intervention programs or research.
2. Participants will demonstrate a high level of engagement and active participation in the small group discussion component of the workshop.
3. Participants will be able to adapt the findings presented to their own bullying prevention/ intervention program or research efforts.

## Resources

<http://www.asah.org>

<http://www.highpointschool.org>

## References

- Carran, D. T. and Kellner, M. H. (in press). Characteristics of bullies and victims among students with emotional disturbance attending approved private special education schools. (Submitted for publication.)
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Raun, W. J., Simon-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behavior among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2904-2100.
- Olweus, D. (1996). The revised Olweus bully/victim questionnaire. Bergen, Norway: Research Center for Health Promotion (HEMIL), University of Bergen, N-5015 Bergen, Norway.  
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- World Health Organization (2002). *Health behavior in school-aged children, 1997-1998: [United States]*. ICPSR version. Calverton, MD: Macro International [producer]. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor].

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Evaluation Form

Trainers: Millicent H. Kellner, Ph.D. and Deborah T. Carran, Ph.D.  
Site: Persistently Safe Schools 2007

Please rate this workshop by circling a number for each statement.

	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree		
I was satisfied with the quality of the discussion.	5	4	3	2	1	
I found the information presented useful to my work.	5	4	3	2	1	
I will be able to incorporate material from the workshop into my work.	5	4	3	2	1	
The presenters had adequate knowledge of the topic covered.	5	4	3	2	1	
Presentation of the materials was understandable.	5	4	3	2	1	
Visual materials and tables were helpful.	5	4	3	2	1	
My questions/needs were addressed.	5	4	3	2	1	
The opportunity to discuss program and research implications within my small group was helpful.	5	4	3	2	1	
The handouts were helpful.	5	4	3	2	1	

Comments: