



Correlates of bullying behaviors among a sample of North American Indigenous adolescents



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A B S T R A C T

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between familial, educational, and psychosocial factors and bullying among 702 North American Indigenous adolescents aged 11–14 years. The study used multinomial logistic regression models to differentiate correlates of bully perpetration and victimization versus being neither and between being a perpetrator versus being a victim. Analyses reveal that being a bully victim had different correlates than being a perpetrator. Perceived discrimination was associated with increased odds of being either a victim or a perpetrator, relative to being neither. Several factors differentiated being a bully perpetrator from being a bully victim: adolescent age, parental warmth and support, depressive symptoms, anger, and school adjustment. These findings expand upon the limited understanding of the factors associated with bullying among North American Indigenous youth. Bullying intervention and prevention programs that target Indigenous adolescents should be culturally grounded and begin early within the family.

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For the past several years, bullying has received extensive notice from school officials, state and federal governments, and the media. It typically occurs when a child is repeatedly exposed to aggressive physical contact, verbal threats, and social exclusion perpetrated by one or more individuals who are considered stronger than the victim (Olweus, 1993, 2010; Stein, Dukes, & Warren, 2007). Recently researchers have distinguished between different categories of bullying, suggesting that precursors, experiences, and outcomes may be very different for children who are predominantly victims, those who are mostly aggressors, and “bully victims” – youth who report being both a victim and a perpetrator of bullying behavior (Dulmas, Sowers, & Theriot, 2006). For example, among a nationally representative sample of youth in grades 6–10, 29.9% reported bullying experiences, with 13% as bully perpetrators, 10.6% as victims, and 6.3% as both (Nansel et al., 2001).

Previous research has identified family (Baldry & Farrington, 2005; Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000), school (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2003), and psychosocial factors (Bauman, 2008; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000) that place children at risk for bullying perpetration and victimization. There is very little work, however, focused on potential differences in bullying behaviors and victimization across various ethnic groups. In particular, we have little information on Indigenous (American Indian/Canadian First Nation) children's experiences with bullying behaviors. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine correlates of bullying perpetration and victimization among Indigenous adolescents.

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Literature review

Family and school influences

Different dimensions of parenting have all been linked to bullying experiences and behaviors (Espelage et al., 2000; Haynie et al., 2001). Baldry and Farrington (2005) found that the lack of parental warmth and the presence of parental conflict were associated with bullying perpetration whereas parent conflict and punitive parenting were related to bully victimization. Having supportive parents is associated with lower levels of bullying victimization (Baldry & Farrington, 2000) and perpetration. For example, having mothers and fathers involved in their children's lives by talking to them about their worries, taking an interest in their school work, and helping them develop future plans has been associated with fewer adolescent bullying behaviors (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). The presence of positive adult role models was also associated with less bullying (Espelage et al., 2000).

Children who report greater school adjustment and bonding are less likely to perpetrate and become victims of bullying (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2003). School settings in which teachers are supportive, actively interested in their students, and who are perceived to have fair standards have fewer incidents of bullying behaviors (Barboza et al., 2009). School climate in general has also been found to be associated with bullying behaviors (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011; Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brenna, & Bradshaw, 2011), with more positive environments, such as those perceived by students to be good places, fostering lower levels of bullying behavior (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011).

Psychosocial correlates

Depressive symptoms have been shown to be both a consequence (Due, Damsgaard, Rikke, & Holstein, 2009; Seeds, Harkness, & Quilty, 2010) and precursor of bullying (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). Bullying perpetrators report depressive symptoms (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2001), as do victims (Bauman, 2008) and bully victims (Haynie et al., 2001; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000). Anger also has been linked to bullying perpetration and victimization (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Champion & Clay, 2007). In a longitudinal study of middle school students, Espelage et al. (2001) reported that higher levels of anger were associated with more bullying behaviors over time.

Bullying among Indigenous children

Indigenous children, like all youth, sometimes must cope with bullies. For example, Carlyle and Steinman (2007) examined physical, verbal, and social bullying behaviors among all middle and high school students from Franklin County, Ohio. Approximately 31% of the American Indian/Alaska Native youth in this sample reported bullying others and 27.5% were victims of bullying 4 or more times in the past year. Lemstra, Rogers, Redgate, Garner, and Moraros (2011) investigated physical, verbal, social, and electronic bullying behaviors among 204, 5th–8th grade, Canadian First Nations youth attending on-reserve schools: 36% were physically bullied, 59% verbally bullied, and 47% were socially bullied at least once during the previous month.

Bully victimization and perpetration may be linked to perceptions of discrimination. It is possible that minority youth are bullied in part because of their minority status (Nansel et al., 2001). Ethnic and minority children often are subjected to discrimination-related bullying behaviors (Scherr & Larson, 2010; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007) and Indigenous children are not immune. Among a sample of 5th–8th grade Indigenous students, 49% had been insulted, 24% had been excluded from an activity, and 15% had been physically threatened because of being American Indian (Whitbeck, Hoyt, McMorris, Chen, & Stubben, 2001). Moreover, being in predominantly white schools may place ethnic and minority youth at increased risk of experiencing both discrimination and bullying victimization (Shin, D'Antonio, Son, Kim, & Park, 2011). Perceptions of discrimination have also been linked to aggressive behaviors. In a longitudinal sample of Indigenous youth, Sittner Hartshorn, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2012) found that perceived discrimination was associated with increases in aggressive delinquency, a relationship that was partially due to feelings of anger that may arise from discrimination. Because previous research has found a link between discrimination and aggression through anger, it is possible that discriminatory experiences may also contribute to other forms of aggression such as bullying experiences.

Age and gender

The findings for gender and bullying perpetration and victimization are mixed. There is some evidence that bullying perpetration and victimization are more common among boys than girls (Bosworth et al., 1999; Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; Haynie et al., 2001), yet other researchers have failed to find gender differences (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Bauman, 2008). Although girls may not report bullying to the same extent as boys, girls also use power aggressively (Olweus, 1993). Typically boys are more likely to assert power via physical aggression whereas girls' bullying takes different forms such as covert gossip and social exclusion (Smith, Pepler, & Craig, 2003). Pepler, Craig, Yuile, and Connolly (2004), however, found a substantial gender overlap in boys and girls social and physical bullying. Bullying behaviors tend decrease with age among middle and high school students (Bauman, 2008; Carlyle & Steinman, 2007; Nansel et al., 2001; Smith, 2010) and the rate of decrease is greater for girls than for boys (Pepler et al., 2004).

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