SCHOOL BULLYING AND THE ADVERSE PSYCHOSOCIAL AFFECTS AMONG YOUTH

A Project

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by

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iii
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Division of Social Work
The adverse psychosocial effects of bullying victimization on school aged youth have and continue to be a concern since the concept’s establishment in the mid 1970s. Perpetuated by the lack of effective interventions, bullying victimization is viewed as both a maladaptive and damaging behavior, detrimental to the fabric of youth in the United States and abroad. Over the last several years, its unfavorable effects have captured national attention despite attempts to eradicate the problem through anti-bullying school programs. As a result, in 2010 the United States Department of Education issued a letter of guidance to colleagues in K-12 as well as higher education, clarifying when student bullying may violate federal education and anti-discrimination law. However, even with this effort the findings within this study highlight the fact that bullying victimization continues to exist and in many cases overlooked within the school setting, significantly impacting those targeted and victimized. In fact, of the 72 published articles examined in this study, the researchers found several studies meeting the inclusion criteria for the variables of inquiry, which include depression, anxiety, suicide and suicidal behaviors,
self-esteem, and social stigmatization. Among these published articles, sixteen included suicidal ideations, fifteen include depression, twelve included suicidal behaviors, twelve included anxiety, twelve included low self-esteem, and eight included social stigmatization. Further content analysis confirmed a common agreement on the severity of bullying, its consequences, and its multi-dimensional impacts on youth, their families, and the society. In all it was found that, school bullying and its subsequent effects continue to be prevalent amongst school aged youth, with findings indicating inadequate and ineffective anti-bullying measures to date.

Francis Yuen, DSW

Date
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to the most important people in my life, to God, because without him none of this would have been possible, to my mother Priscilla, who is resting peacefully in Heaven, I wish you could have been here to see me graduate. I love and miss you! To my father Robert Sr., Thanks for always believing in me, to my sister Sharon, Thank you for always providing me with words of encouragement, and to my grandmother Jenny, who has always supported me no matter what. I want to thank all of you for your love, patience, support, and encouragement. You are my inspiration in completing this journey that I embarked on, and the reason I have been able to complete this project. I love you all!

-Robert R. Pimentel Jr.
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We would also like to acknowledge all of our friends and family, all the people in our support groups, as well as fellow classmates who have been instrumental in helping us get through these last two years. Thank You!
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. THE PROBLEM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Collaboration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Research Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Bullying</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Table 1: Frequency Distribution by Variable</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Table 2: Characteristics of the Studies Included With Data</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Table 3: Characteristics of Studies Included With No Data</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
THE PROBLEM

It is evident in today’s society that young people are facing a myriad of challenges, particularly in the school environment. Issues such as poverty, racism, idealized and overly sexualized pop-culture, as well as subjection to relentless advertising and targeted marketing campaigns, may all pose threats to healthy development and identity formation. Public awareness of such issues represents a crucial component in supporting youth through these trials; due to its prevalent, destructive, and insidiously pervasive nature, school bullying has recently taken the forefront amongst these rising concerns. The compiling research on school bullying has identified the association of the behavior with a variety of negative outcomes (i.e. threats to physical safety, failure to meet academic expectations). Specifically, the severity in consequences, and comprehensive and chronic nature of the adverse psychosocial effects associated with bullying is of greatest concern for the researchers. In an effort to fully grasp the complexity and extent of this behavior’s impact on youth, this master’s project investigated literature pertaining to school bullying and its relationship to each of: anxiety, depression, social stigmatization, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior.

Several studies exemplify findings representative of the general nature of bullying outcomes. For instance, Strauss (2005) explains that youth who are ridiculed and
victimized within the school setting find school a fearful place to go, resulting in frequent absences and sometimes academic failure. In a national study from 2005/2006 covering health behaviors in school aged children (grades 6-10), with a total of 7,182 students participating, Wang, Iannotti, and Nansal, (2009) found that 17.2% of males were hit, kicked, pushed, shoved, and locked indoors, compared to 8.7% of females. The same study also found that 32% of males reported being called mean names, being made fun of, and teased in a hurtful way causing anxiety and academic problems, in comparison to 31.1% of females who reported the same. Such findings clearly illustrate the academic challenges and physical dangers so many school age youth are faced with. However, the rate at which these youth experience psychosocial issues (often severe and chronic) resulting from these behaviors is arguably even more alarming.

Wang and colleagues found that 23.6% of males and 27.4% of females who were bullied experienced relational problems due to social isolation and exclusion, lowering their self esteem and confidence levels, interfering with the development of pro-social skills, and were at risk for future psychosocial problems. Other research has identified the extensive nature of these psychosocial issues, finding youth not only at risk, but also currently experiencing these struggles. A national study by Gray, Kahhan, and Janicke, (2009) found that 30% of school age children reported experiencing chronic emotional, verbal, and or physical attacks stemming from bullying behavior, resulting in higher symptoms of loneliness, anxiety, depression, low-self esteem, social stigmatization, and in the most extreme cases suicidal behavior.
Since the inception of the problem of bullying in the public consciousness, various studies have attempted to address and resolve this behavior by focusing on such psychosocial outcomes. Although steps have been taken to address the issue over the years (i.e., public awareness campaigns, school programs, anti-bullying & anti-hazing legislation), the continuance of the problem and the profound psychosocial impacts the behavior is still having amongst school youth is indicated in the research (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpada, 2008; Elledge et al., 2010; Hixon, 2009; Wackerfuss, 2008). In fact, the problem is not only pervasive in its continuance, but may even be increasing. According to Marley (2008), sampling students from England for an Ofsted study, it was found that two-thirds of the youth that were questioned stated that bullying is getting worse, and nearly half stated that it is becoming a lot worse.

Several explanations can be adopted to account for this persistence and perhaps escalation. Perceptions of increased prevalence may be due to greater awareness of the behavior and increased attention by media platforms and social networking, or developments in technology may represent new methodologies for the behavior to employ. In spite of the elusive nature of causality, such findings supplicate the researcher’s investigation into the efficacy of currently utilized intervention and prevention efforts. In one such study, Elledge et al. (2010) argue that although universal interventions are capable of reducing school bullying incidents, little is known about them, especially those that deal with bully victims; this lack of knowledge has in some
ways perpetuated the problem in terms of establishing and/or implementing effective interventions.

**Statement of Collaboration**

Robert Pimentel and Zack Kampf worked collaboratively in the planning, implementation, and writing of this research project. The authors worked equally on investigating the body of literature available on school bullying, and selecting the most relevant material for the purposes of this project. The authors then developed the literature review independently. Robert Pimentel was responsible for presenting the review of literature related to the overview and history of school bullying research, and the research related to depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, and suicidal behaviors. Zack Kampf was responsible for presenting a review of the literature related to the culture of bullying, social stigmatization, low self esteem, and recent developments in the research (specifically as they relate to cyberbullying). The authors collaborated equally in developing methods for data collection and analysis, as well as concluding remarks.

**Background of the Problem**

As evidenced in the discussion above, school bullying and its associated adverse psychosocial effects cause significant challenges in the lives of today’s youth. It is conceivable to assume that youth have faced such challenges throughout the history of school settings, and that the knowledge and awareness gained from recent years of increasing research has assisted in diminishing this maladaptive behavior and its consequences. Though the body of available data is relatively small, assorted research
findings have led to various intervention and prevention endeavors, which have subsequently been implemented in numerous school systems over the years. Of the studies consulted, however, the authors were able to identify an alarming trend: findings continue to display the persistence of this destructive behavior despite these efforts. The following presents an overview of historical developments in the research on school bullying, with specific attention given to the continuance of the behavior, as well as the detrimental costs of failing to adequately address this problem.

Borntrager, Davis, Bernstein, and Gorman (2009) report that prior to the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, researchers paid little to no attention to the rising problem of bullying or peer victimization. Moreover, it has been noted that research concerning bullying was not officially looked at until the mid 1970’s and 1980’s, when Dan Olweus, a Scandinavian researcher, initiated the worlds first known systematic bullying research (Olweus, 2007). According to Aluede et al. (2008), Olweus investigated what was once considered to be mobbing in Scandinavian schools, and consequently identified the behavior as aggression in schools or what we now know to be bullying. From his landmark study he found bullying behavior negatively affecting approximately 15% of all students in Scandinavia. Given the significance of his study, Olweus published his findings for the purpose of exposing the behavior in 1973 in Scandinavia, and later in the United States in 1978. It was not until ten years later in 1983, that bullying behavior and its negative affects truly received adequate research attention, when a newspaper article in Scandinavia revealed that three adolescent boys from Norway had committed suicide.
as a result of severe bullying by their peers (Olweus, 2007). From this major event sparked the triggering of national interest, ultimately prompting a large-scale study centered on school bullying behavior and peer victimization (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008).

In the 1990’s, arguments against bullying behavior and peer victimization reached legislative status in both the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments, prompting a surge of international interest in bullying research. By the middle of that decade, researchers in the United States began working with Olweus for the purposes of identifying and addressing bullying behavior within school settings in the U.S. (Olweus, 2007). Since this time, concerns around bullying and its consequences have been a prevalent discourse among researchers around the country. In response to this, schools across the United States adopted anti-bullying programs between 2000 and 2002 (Greenya, 2005).

In recent years these concerns have captured increased national attention through personal and public outcry, media awareness campaigns, school education, and prevention and legislative efforts. Various advancements in technology have presumably contributed to this increase in public attention. For example, personal testimonies and case studies are easily accessible through the platforms of television and social media sites. In spite of the increased presence of bullying awareness among the public, a review of selections from the last 10 years of research on bullying indicates the blatant prevalence of the behavior, as well as the unfortunate costs youth are paying for its endurance.
In a national study completed in 2005 by the National Crime Prevention Counsel, it was found that up to an astonishing 75% of American school age youth have been victims of school bullying as a result of the continuance of this behavior, making it the most enduring problem within school settings (Greenya, 2005). In addition, a more disturbing relation was found within the same study where it was noted by the U.S. Department of Education studying school shooters found that over the last 25 years, two-thirds of 37 documented school shootings noted that the perpetrators had reported being bullied and persecuted by others prior to the attacks (Greenya, 2005).

The continued struggle for equality amongst youth within the school setting can still be seen a few years later, after the push for schools to adopt anti-bullying programs was initially made. In a study centered on bullying behavior and victimization, Scholte, Engels, Overbeek, de Kemp, and Haselager (2007), sampled 189 adolescent girls and 328 adolescent boys from 100 middle schools, finding between 20% and 30% of the youth reported victimization by bullies within their primary school setting. Moreover, within their same study it was found that between 10% and 20% of the youth sampled reported being bullies themselves. Generalizing these percentages to the overall population implies an astounding number of youth being victimized. In terms of the actual number of youth affected, a nationwide study cited by Aluede et al. (2008), reported that in American schools alone, an estimated 282,000 students are physically attacked in both primary and secondary school settings every month. It was found within the same study
that approximately 160,000 students stay home from school because they are afraid of being bullied.

Among some of the most current studies, findings continue to indicate rates of victimized youth similar to those found prior to anti-bullying campaigns, with exceptionally higher rates found among certain populations. For example, in a recent study by Schoen and Schoen (2010), evidence was found suggesting that 67% of special needs youth report being bullied within their school setting in comparison to 25% of their non-handicapped peers, approximately eight years after the adoption of anti-bullying school programs. Furthermore, Schoen and Schoen (2010) argue that with expanding information and communication technologies, electronic bullying (better known as cyber bullying) can be equally as devastating as traditional bullying, reporting that one-third of 1,500 youth who participated in a survey from the National Prevention Crime Counsel, attested to online victimization.

With these kinds of findings it is hard to dismiss the pervasiveness of this behavior much less the seemingly ineffectiveness of anti-bullying programs. Overall bullying behavior and its detrimental affects have and continue to negatively impact and affect youth with no real indicators of the behavior diminishing or going away. In fact, Aluede et al. (2008) suggest that the behavior, for the most part, is continuing to be overlooked and not dealt with accordingly, especially within the school setting.
Statement of the Research Problem

This Master’s Project examined literature pertaining to the association between school bullying and the psychosocial issues that affect youth. In review of available archival data, the researchers discovered that findings from a significant amount of the literature is limited to presentations related to specific variables influencing and stemming from bullying behaviors (i.e. school culture and the frequency of bullying behaviors). Very limited efforts have been made over the years to demonstrate the complexity and extent of the overall psychosocial impacts of this behavior on individual youth. Moreover, the researchers were unable to locate any studies addressing the incongruence between escalating interventions and the continued prevalence of the behavior and its consequences.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this Master’s Project is to perform a content analysis on the studies consulted, focusing on the variables of anxiety, depression, social stigmatization, low self esteem, and suicidal ideations and behaviors, covering the last 20 years of relevant literature on the subject. In doing so, the researchers will attempt to provide a more accurate presentation of the overall ramifications of school bullying on youth, as well as identify the trends in prevalence of the aforementioned variables. This study aims to verify whether or not current and historical efforts of intervention and prevention have been effective in reducing both the prevalence of youth engaged in bullying behaviors and youth reporting adverse psychosocial consequences resulting from such behaviors.
The analysis will also be used to determine which of the psychosocial issues investigated youth are at the greatest risk of experiencing.

In addition to the purposes discussed above, the information gained through this review and analysis of the last 20 years of relevant literature will be used to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge. It is the hope of the researchers that this summary can be used to inform those interested (i.e. teachers, policy makers, social workers) of new developments, creating space for more appropriate models of intervention. For example, various anti-bullying programs have been implemented in schools over the course of the identified 20-year time frame, and could conceivably be more suited to accommodate the needs of students by incorporating models based on more recent findings. The study will also identify gaps found in the current literature, so as to guide future research endeavors and contribute to the ongoing development of a comprehensive understanding of this problem, consequently eliciting greater opportunities for more effective responses to this devastating problem.

**Theoretical Framework**

In conceptualizing and implementing this Master’s Project, the researchers predominantly used two notable theoretical frameworks to guide their inquiry. The first theory with which the researchers align is that of social dominance theory, and its relevance to bullying behaviors (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Sidanius et al. (2004) state that like the psychological approaches, most structural theories also focus on a single root cause of prejudice and discrimination. For the most part, the structural
theories concentrate their attention on competition over material and symbolic resources. In direct contrast, social dominance focuses on both the individual and structural factors that contributed to various forms of group-based oppression. According to Kugler, Cooper, and Nosek (2010), group-based dominance is the preference of one's own group over another’s, with negative attitudes and prejudices toward the other group. It has been noted that one of the distinctive features of living within a social environment is the formation of social dominance hierarchies (Moosa & Minhaz Ud-Dean, 2011). In fact, the same study states that members of a social society face intense competition over resources, which ultimately leads to competitive encounters and levels of dominance.

Moreover, social dominance theory is noted as a general attitudinal orientation towards intergroup relations centering on issues of equality versus hierarchy and superiority versus inferiority, with beliefs related to prejudice and inequality. Within this attitude lies the perpetuation of the degradation of lower status groups and group members alike (Kugler et al., 2010). According to Moosa and Minhaz Ud-Dean (2011) those subjected to the hierarchy of the dominance status are prone to both physical and psychological stressors, which can lead to chronic stress related pathways. In addition, top-down hierarchies such as those exhibited by social dominance have been noted to impact those deemed as subordinate with the greatest stressor level. Furthermore, the study of social dominance theory focuses on the universal and exquisitely subtle forms of discrimination and oppression stemming from opposition to equality and support for group based dominance (Kugler et al., 2010). Moosa and Minhaz Ud-Dean (2011) states
that when an individual is subjected to levels of injustice and or unfairness, levels of inferiority set in as well as a drop in the perceived rank of the disadvantaged individual. Additionally, the theory proposes that group discrimination tends to be systematic because of sociological ideologies that help to coordinate the actions of the institutions and individuals (Sidanius et al., 2004).

Contemporary researchers preferred the social dominance theory, as opposed to other more popular theories such as conflict theory or social identity theory, when it comes to understanding the shunned, stigmatized, victimized, and oppressed nature of those being bullied. It is the hope of the researchers that by thoroughly applying the social dominance theory to school bullying behavior, knowledge gained can be used to create programs and services, as well as recommend social policies to work with victims of bullying, and to educate society about the significant impacts bullying has on youth.

In the realm of social work education and social work practices, the researchers believe that by combining the strengths perspective with other approaches (such as risk and protective/resiliency factors), future victims of bullying can be better served. Several studies have investigated these factors and their relevance to addressing the problem of school bullying and its negative outcomes. For example, Pollard and Hawkins (1999) found that by adding the enhancement of protective factors and the promotion of resiliency to programs focusing only at the reduction of risk factors, more positive outcomes could be achieved (specifically in terms of reducing adolescent violence and improving academic performance). In a similar study, Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt,
and Arseneault (2010) investigated the role of protective family relationship factors as they relate to resiliency in emotional and behavioral development following bullying victimization. Results indicated that the family factors of maternal warmth, sibling warmth and a positive atmosphere at home are associated with positive emotional and behavioral adjustment following bullying victimization.

Donnon and Hammond (2007) explain that a strengths-based approach has the potential, if used by educators, parents, students, and members of the community, to promote the development of resiliency through collaborative strategies, and in turn address the needs of youth within their school setting. Donnon and Hammond (2007) propose that building off individual and community inherent strengths, in an effort to provide aid for empowerment, will serve as a catalyst towards the meaningful goal of equality and autonomy. It is the belief of the researchers that strengths-based interventions will provide beneficial impact when used both preventatively and in response to existing bullying conditions.

**Definition of Terms**

To assist the reader in understanding and implementing findings of this Master’s Project, the following discussion provides a comprehensive operational definition of bullying and the behaviors that constitute it, including a presentation discerning direct from indirect bullying, and the specific and recent modality of indirect bullying known as cyber bullying. It should be noted that the identified psychosocial variables under investigation by the researchers are defined in chapter 2.
Marini, Dane, Bosacki, and YLC-Cura (2006) offer their definition of bullying as a systematic and repeated type of aggression involving peers and a range of psychosocial problems, including low self-control and a high acceptance of antisocial behavior and delinquency. In addition, Marini et al. (2006) further specify that bullying behaviors may occur as either direct or indirect, each with their own negative affects. According to Marini and colleagues, direct bullying behaviors manifest in terms of apparent physical acts and verbal aggression, while indirect behaviors are carried out via covert social manipulation, allowing for the possible avoidance of detection. In a more recent and related study Schoen and Schoen (2010) offer an expanded definition of bullying and how the behavior manifests itself. Their definition includes both physical and verbal aggression, breaking it down even further and describing direct bullying as including hitting, kicking, punching, spitting, threatening, humiliating, and scorning; body language, gestures, exclusion, spreading rumors, insults through text messaging or e-mail are also included as a part of indirect bullying.

In recent years, indirect bullying, specifically utilizing technological platforms for victimization, has become so pervasive that Billitteri (2008) has labeled the behavior an epidemic. The article reported approximately 70% of heavy internet users (primarily girls) have experienced at least one event of online intimidation, defining such interactions as cyberbullying: the use of computers, cell phones, social networking sites and other technologies to threaten or humiliate others. Chibbaro (2007) broadly defines cyberbullying as the act of using technologies (i.e. e-mails, cell phones, social networking
sites) with the intent of causing harm to others. More specifically, the author cites Willard’s (2006) suggestion that cyberbullies are those displaying behaviors such as harassing, stalking, defaming, impersonating, and threatening victims through technological platforms. These may include e-mail, cell phone text messaging, instant messaging, and/or social networking sites.

Assumptions

Inherent in the conceptualization, interpretation, and application of the arguments made in this Master’s Project, are several assumptions made by the authors. Principally, the authors align with a constructionist perspective on school bullying, as opposed to understanding the behavior from a functionalist perspective. Consequently, the authors construe school bullying as a learned phenomenon, a socially constructed norm, or a behavior that is not otherwise a natural or obligatory function of development. Therefore, the authors position themselves around the notion that with the proper knowledge, tools, support and interventions at all levels of micro, mezzo, and macro practice, the problem of bullying can be effectively addressed. Analogously, it is the authors’ belief that knowledge related to the subject is a fundamental requirement for developing effective programs, policies, and intervention and prevention strategies.

As it relates to the identified variables under investigation, it is the authors’ postulation that if one reduces the rates of bullying in schools, the likelihood of having a positive outcome in dealing with the subsequent psychosocial affects will correspondingly increase. Additionally, current bullying programs merely target rates of
bullying behavior with the intention of lowering prevalence. These programs neglect to address the negative psychosocial outcomes experienced by youth as a result. The authors believe a more holistic approach, one that incorporates interventions specifically related to the psychosocial outcomes experienced by those engaged in bullying behaviors, will maximize the effectiveness at diminishing the overall impact of school bullying. Finally, it is the authors’ belief that with increased knowledge and awareness related to this issue, social workers can play an effective role in bringing resolution on all levels of micro, mezzo and macro.

**Justification**

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) entreats the following standards of practice: “knowledge of human development and behavior; of social and economic, and cultural institutions, and of the interaction of all these factors as well as skills in developing relationships, brokering and accessing services, assessing needs and facilitating change” (“Practice,” 2012). The profession also advocates for oppressed and marginalized populations, facilitates informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions, and challenges social injustice. Youth are in an intrinsically more vulnerable and disempowered position in the larger society, and children and adolescents face important developmental and identity formation stages. Due to the overwhelming prevalence of school bullying, the devastating psychosocial consequences of the behavior, and the unique social location of youth within the larger society, it can be argued that the ethical obligations and standards of practice for the
profession of social work justify both the investigations of this Master’s Project and the application of the resulting data.

As previously discussed, research has shown that although there has been an increase in public awareness and media coverage, as well as escalating interventions and program implementations, the problem has not been effectively dealt with. In conducting this project, the researchers will attempt to identify the best social work practice methods for plausible solutions, resources, and coping strategies as a means for youth to successfully deal with and overcome the identified psychosocial affects of school bullying. With this knowledge, social workers can make a positive impact in this process by utilizing all levels of micro, mezzo and macro interventions, including: individual and family clinical interventions, community organizing, school collaborations, school rallies, psychoeducational student campaigns, school policy development, district wide interventions with community involvement, and national policy and legislative measures. In so doing, social workers will be in alignment with professional standards and ethics by directly influencing the institution of public education, promoting social welfare, informing future research, and evaluating and contributing to current policies and programs.

Limitations

It is important to note that the psychosocial issues experienced by youth as a result of bullying may not be limited to those addressed in this study. Additionally, studies suggest that such issues developed during childhood or adolescence persist into
adulthood, although this trend was not investigated for the purposes of this study. Furthermore, the researchers’ focus is solely on bullying victimization among school age youth within the school setting. Bullying behaviors outside of the school context (with the exception of cyberbullying) are not addressed in this research project. Due to the sensitivity of this topic, the researchers were not able to interview or survey youth directly. Rather, the researchers relied on existing literature to conduct a content analysis of studies relating to the psychosocial effects of bullying. Time constraints and accessibility issues prevented the researchers from thoroughly investigating and critiquing information related to existing anti-bullying programs.
This chapter focuses attention on an analysis and review of what is considered by the researchers to be the most relevant literature on bullying studies to date. Included in the discussion is a brief overview of bullying, a note on the cultural factors involved with bullying, the occurrence of a selection of prominent and adverse psychosocial affects resulting from bullying behaviors, and a summary of recent developments on bullying and the research involved. Specific considerations of psychosocial affects are presented in terms of depression, anxiety, social stigmatization and low self-esteem, as well as suicidal ideations and behaviors.

Overview

Concerns around bullying and its consequences have been a prevalent discourse among researchers for the last 30 years, with a gradual increase in attention given to this injurious behavior over the last 20 years. Unfortunately, even with increased recognition the problem has remained, along with its various negative psychosocial affects. According to aforementioned findings, adjustment within the school setting have been made but with little to no avail in terms of making significant progress in addressing and decreasing the problematic behavior. In fact, in a recent nationwide study it was found that above 15% of middle school students ages 12 to 13 who were surveyed reported being severely distressed and impacted by bullying behavior and bullying victimization.
within their school setting (Aleude et al., 2008). This level of impact and the magnitude of this troublesome behavior has caused an increase in a desire for a move to action. However, as the years go by still little has been done to effectively address the growing concern, signaling the extensiveness of the problem and the challenges around effectively addressing and resolving the problem from school settings all together.

**Culture of Bullying**

Throughout the years of developing research on bullying, the authors found a significant amount of literature analyzing the behavior from a social/cultural perspective, specifically as it relates to causal factors and platforms for intervention and prevention efforts. This perspective encompasses many dimensions, including: issues related to group and organizational dynamics, rituals and rights of passage, power and status, social learning, institutionalization, socially constructed norms, and collective perceptions, attitudes and biases. Together, these dimensions may be understood as a culture of bullying, and are often presented in terms of school environment, structure, or climate. Studies indicate that this culture is a pervasive phenomenon, and an important consideration in attempting to understand or address the behavior, preventatively or otherwise (Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009; Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009). The following is a review of the literature relating to the various cultural influences on bullying behaviors, including several efforts made to understand and measure school climate, and the importance of this phenomenon in
addressing the continued prevalence and negative psychosocial affects of bullying among youth.

Bandyopadhyay et al. (2009) cite research, stating that “bullying prevention programs attempt to modify school climate by changing student attitudes that promote bullying and fostering behaviors that prevent it” (p. 338), and that bullying behavior is harmful to the victims as well as the entire school climate, as it creates a culture of fear and intimidation (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Olweus & Limber, 2000). Bandyopadhyay and colleagues suggest that for schools to adequately address the issue of bullying, they must first measure the extent to which bullying is a problem. Schools may then begin to modify the cultural influences instigating or incubating bullying behaviors, by targeting two areas: decreasing student supportive attitudes of bullying and aggression, and increasing student perceptions that seeking help is acceptable and will yield support. For this purpose, the study suggested the efficacy of a school climate scale measuring the indicators of: prevalence of teasing and bullying, aggressive attitudes, and willingness to seek help.

When evaluating school climates and their relationship to bullying, Bradshaw and Waasdorp (2009) used the following a different set of indicators as determinates for the prevalence of bullying. These included student and teacher attitudes related to victimization, retaliation, perceptions of safety, perpetration of bullying, indicators of disorder (i.e. suspension rate, student-teacher ratio), and student characteristics (i.e. sex, status in school). Research shows that bully and bully-victim attitudes toward aggression
often reflect the perception that such behaviors are normal and acceptable, and possess high levels of retaliatory attitudes; victims on the other hand, typically possess the lowest levels of retaliatory attitudes (Bradshaw, Sawyer & O’Brennan, 2009). Bradshaw and colleagues also found that children involved in any form of bullying behavior report feeling less safe and less connected to the school. Bradshaw and Waasdorp (2009) specify that while it may appear their indicators are a result of bullying behaviors, social disorganization theory suggest these indicators may actually be contributing factors in the prevalence of bullying. It should be noted that determining the causality of this relationship may be difficult, but the theory suggests a transactional process.

Measurements such as teacher and student attitudes, awareness, and reactions towards bullying behavior have also been used to indicate the structural or environmental factors contributing to and/or influencing bullying behaviors. For example, by surveying 51 teachers from two different schools in London, UK (both of which reported different rates of bullying and a high proportion of minority students) Siann (1993) found that the majority of teachers interviewed believed there are gender differences in the type of bullying; in schools reporting high rates of bullying, teachers were also more likely to perceive behaviors as bullying and to observe bullying. Findings also indicated that most teachers interviewed subscribed to the notion of a typical victim personality. A similar belief was reported by Hamarusa and Kaikkonen (2008), stating that among students surveyed, the following represent several of the characteristics found to be of difference from the student cultural ideals, placing those displaying them at increased risk for
victimization: quietness, shyness, being timid, sensitivity and being unfashionable, sickness/illness, race, stupidity, childishness, or exaggerated swottishness or religiosity.

This concept of difference is integral to the discourse on school culture and bullying behaviors. In the same study Hamarusa and Kaikkonen (2008) propose, “difference is at the core of bullying” (p. 336). The focus of bullying often revolves around the perception of difference between the bully and the victim, or the victim and the audience. The act of bullying then legitimizes the attitudes of the victim as inferior in the eyes of the audience, and perpetuates the cycle of violence. This discussion is of particular significance among certain sub-populations with visible markers from the hegemonic majority. Bauman (2000) and Kristeva (1992) found that in communities, those identified as strangers or others, are easily distinguishable and were frequently isolated or bullied. Highly visible characteristics (i.e. gender, race, physical disability) are more likely to trigger status categorizations, patriarchal biases, and other marginalizing narratives inherent to the larger cultural discourse (Howard & Renfrow 2003; Ridgeway 1997). For example, in mainstream American culture, youth who are overweight or obese are visibly divergent from the norm, and therefore are more frequently exposed to victimizing behaviors from bullies. Analogously, research has found that social disadvantage (another form of difference) was found to be a contributing factor in bullying behaviors (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Similar to the discussion of difference and its implications on bullying, is that of social norms. In a study investigating 120 male primary school students, aged 10–13
years from five schools, Ojala and Nesdale (2004) found evidence to support their hypothesis that individual attitudes toward bullying behavior can be moderated by salient group norms. Other studies have reported similar findings related to group norms. For example, Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, Kiesner, and Griffiths (2008) studied 85 children aged 7 and 9, and found evidence that children’s bullying intentions are greater when the in-group was given the norm of out-group dislike, as opposed to those who were given the norm of out-group liking.

Corresponding with the role of group-like or dislike in bullying behavior is the role of power and status as an objective for bullies. Veenstra, Lindenberg, Munniksma, and Kornelis Dijkstra (2010) cite several sources advocating status and affection as primary goals underlying human interactions, specifically addressing the importance of status as an important motivator in bullying behavior (Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Vonkorff, 1997; Huberman et al., 2004; Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). The authors surveyed 481 children from 26 classrooms (grades 5-8), finding that bullies, whether male or female, did not report experiencing rejection by the gender to which the bullying was not directed, supporting the inference of the pursuit of status as a motivator. Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, and Salmivalli (2009) also analyzed bullying behavior and the role of power and status. Findings indicated that bullies are able to dominate weaker classmates, often selecting them on the basis of lower social status, specifically those who do not use proactive aggression. Furthermore, the study denotes the self-reinforcing nature of the bully’s quest for status; the domination of peers and the
resulting prestige is often regarded by the bully as confirmation of his or her behavior.

However, motivators in aggressive and bullying behaviors should not be isolated to intrapersonal experiences of the bully or victim alone. A comprehensive and holistic understanding of a culture of bullying requires the integration of the role of group dynamics. Atlas and Pepler (1998) assessed the prevalence and nature of bullying among 190 students in 8 different classrooms at a Toronto public school, observing the occurrence of bullying behavior approximately twice per hour; findings indicated that peers were involved in 85% of the observed episodes. Applying knowledge of group dynamics, social roles, and social learning to bullying behavior provides a more complete grasp of its complexity, eliciting various faculties for prevention and intervention that may otherwise go unheeded. For example, Atlas and Pepler (1998) identified several different social roles present within the context of a given bullying occurrence: victim, bully, reinforcer of the bully, assistant of the bully, defender of the victim and outsider. Acknowledging participants in bullying behavior beyond the binary of bully and victim admonishes the need to examine how these seemingly extraneous roles are embodied.

Social learning theory offers one such explanation, and can be defined as “learning of expected and therefore socially appropriate and desirable behaviors” (Khan and Cangemi, 1979, p. 45). In a study sampling 252 elementary school students and their mothers, examining the influence social learning has on bullying, Georgiou (2008) reported a negative relationship between maternal responsiveness and school aggression (i.e. bullying), a positive association between overprotective mothering and victimization,
and a positive relationship between maternal depressiveness and both victimization and bullying behaviors. The author cites Patterson (1982, 1986), stating: “bullying starts at home” (p. 109). Congruent with social learning theory, the author proposes “a responsive mother…model[s] warmth, empathy, kindness and compassion, which children may emulate in their peer relations. Children who display these attributes are, by definition, less aggressive” (p. 121). Analyzing these results from a social learning perspective assists in generalizing the results beyond the bully victim duality to include other roles within the group dynamics inherent in school bullying, and implies that children learn these roles through social relationships.

The implications of socially learned roles extend beyond early childhood modeling of parental behavior. Children model their parents regarding acceptable behaviors, but also look to others with leadership positions, status or other forms of social capital for social cues (i.e. school faculty and staff, church leaders, pop culture icons, upperclassmen). In this way, children may model various social roles supporting bullying behaviors, as well as internalize a normalized perspective of the behavior by observing the behaviors and reactions of others involved. Various researches have observed this phenomenon. O’Higgins-Normana, Goldrick, and Harrisona (2009) investigated the efficacy of a mediation program in a comprehensive co-educational school in the Republic of Ireland, addressing the conflict between emerging equality legislation and traditional teachings of the Catholic Church, specifically as it relates to issues around the subject of homosexuality. The authors specify that schools in Ireland
remain predominantly Catholic and cite O’Higgins-Norman’s (2004) findings that the use of derogatory language and other bullying behaviors of a homophobic nature are endemic in Irish post-primary schools, indicative of the role of tradition and social learning on the normalization of bullying behaviors. Knafo (2003) reported a similar pattern in a study of Eighty-two authoritarian and 252 nonauthoritarian Israeli fathers and their adolescent children. The author found that of the adolescents interviewed, 47% of those reporting best friends who frequently engage in bullying behaviors also reported having authoritarian fathers who endorsed corresponding values.

On a larger collective scale, the normalization of bullying and bully-like behavior manifests in the form of cultural rites of passage. For example, Hoover (1999) found that 80% of NCAA athletes reported some form hazing initiation (as cited in Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2001) reported: “initiations are, in effect, rites of passage used to educate newcomers as to their place in the hierarchical structure of the group,” and are “pervasive in our society, and are inherently abusive practices which can traumatize and discourage students” (p.203). In an effort to address the issue of hazing among high school students (a similar issue to bullying, although noted to differ in the fact that bullying typically reveals an intention to exclude, while hazing typically seeks to include, although often through humiliating, degrading or abusive means sometimes similar to those observed in instances of bullying), the Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter (2003) made the following statement:

“Some parents may wonder why otherwise ‘good’ kids willingly participate in or
observe abusive acts. In certain social situations in which there’s uncertainty, people – especially kids – often look to leaders for social cues about acceptable behavior. Being told what to do and how to participate reduces the discomfort of social uncertainty. Likewise, group social situations often help to relax individual responsibility such that kids might assume that since everyone else is doing it, it must be OK” (p. 1).

In response to the understanding gained by analyses of bullying behavior from a cultural perspective, several studies have investigated school anti-bullying and prevention programs from this paradigm, yielding promising results. In her analysis of bullying behaviors in a junior high school during its second year of program implementation, Coyle (2008) identified several school cultural characteristics found to be of support during the implementation. These included a sense of family, warmth, collaboration, connections between staff members, connections between staff and students, and a school mission with the central focus being learning. In a similar study investigating the efficacy of school-wide socio-ecological intervention program (although noted to be unique in the fact that this program included whole-school, classroom, family and individual interventions) Cross et al. (2011) found students in the intervention group to report a 31% lower rate of regular bullying victimization, as opposed to the comparison group. The study also found the comparison group to be at 1.6-times higher odds of not reporting bullying incidents, as compared to the intervention group. Importantly, at each of the studies posttest’s (occurring once a year over 3 years) students in the intervention
group were found to be approximately 1.5-times less likely than the comparison students to report seeing another student their age or younger being bullied. Smith, Ananiadou, and Cowie (2003) reviewed the SAVE anti-bullying campaign in Spain, implemented from years 1995 to 2000, and focusing on the four components of: management of interpersonal relationships, cooperative group work and the curriculum, training in emotions, values and attitudes, and direct intervention for pupils at risk or involved in bullying behaviors. The study found the number of victimized pupils decreased by 57%, the number of bullying pupils reduced by 16%, and the number of students reporting positive peer relationships increased by 16%.

While the available research regarding cultural dynamics inherent in bullying behavior provides new perspectives and possibilities for addressing the issue, some barriers remain in terms of practical applications for these findings to real world scenarios. For example, it would be reasonable to conclude that the extent to which schools have adopted anti-bullying programs, coupled with the positive reported results of such programs (i.e. the studies discussed above) suggest significant progress towards the resolution of the issue of school bullying. However, in a census of over 20,000 school aged youth conducted in 2008, Schneider, O’Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) found that 15.8% of students reported victimization from cyberbullying, and 25.9% reported victimization from school bullying in the past 12 months, indicating little to no improvement in prevalence of these behaviors from reported rates prior to the widespread implementation of school bullying programs. Causal factors for this incongruence may
include a large proportion of programs neglecting to incorporate cultural components identified to be supportive in interventions, or may also imply the use of new platforms by youth (outside of the traditional school setting, and therefore extraneous to currently utilized interventions) to facilitate similar behaviors undetected and unaddressed.

It should also be noted that several studies gave critical discussion to the elusive nature of the definition of bullying (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2009). This becomes problematic, as without a universal definition of the behaviors constituting bullying, individual interpretations of the term effect the reported prevalence. For example, Bradshaw et al. (2009) found that African American youth were more likely to report victimization if the survey was presented in terms of individual examples of the behavior, rather than using the term “bullied.” This makes it difficult to utilize the findings of various studies measuring school climates for intervention and prevention purposes, and implies the need for mixed-methods research. Bradshaw and Waasdorp (2009) also suggest the need for further mixed-methods research in this area, due to the typically small amount of variance found in the aforementioned determinates for the prevalence of bullying.

These difficulties in generalization and continuing trends of prevalence despite informed program implementation are of significant concern to the authors, as it is their belief that as bullying behaviors continue, the corresponding psychosocial issues plaguing youth will prevail, often generating long-term and severe castigations for those effected.
Depression

Depression is one of several significant factors that have been linked to bullying behavior as an adverse psychosocial affect. Seen through a clinical lens, depression is defined as a loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities, coupled with several possible symptoms of which include: feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem, and recurrent thoughts of suicidal ideations, and or plans to attempt (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). With this in mind, the relevance of depression as it relates to bullying victimization can be better conceptualized, especially due to the fact that much of the identified symptoms can be found with those victimized by this behavior.

Perpetuated by the maladaptive behavior of bullying, depression can potentially have profound and devastating affects on the victims who find themselves impacted by it. In fact, depression has been identified as the fourth leading contributor to what is known as the Global Burden of Disease, with future projections that claim to rank it second by 2030, securing its relevancy as an adverse psychosocial affect (Lund et al., 2008). For the purpose of clarification, Murray and Lopez (1996) define the Global Burden of Disease as a comprehensive regional and global assessment study of mortality and disability boasting a staggering 107 diseases, assorted injuries, and 10 risk factors; signaling the magnitude that this unfavorable affect can have.

In correspondence with some of the earlier findings mentioned on bullying victimization, it was discovered in a study conducted by the University of South Carolina, surveying 6,300 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, that intense and chronic
bullying victimization (encompassing either physical or emotional abuse or a combination of the two) can trigger depression and emotional pain (Koch, 1999). Moreover, within the same study it was found that 25% of youth nationwide will need some form of mental health services including services for depression; less then one-third of those in need will receive those services. This finding is alarming when considering the impact that bullying victimization has, as noted across various studies. Consistent with the universities study it was found in a landmark meta-analysis on bullying behavior and psychosocial maladjustment by Hawker and Boulton (2000), that victimization is most strongly related to depression.

With bullying victimization continuing to be ubiquitous among youth, the solidity of the research findings continue to increase and depict an association between bullying victimization and depression. According to Seal and Young (2003), who conducted a study on the prevalence of bullying behavior and peer victimization among adolescent youth, surveying 1,126 middle school students with ages ranging from 12 to 17 from five school districts in the northern delta region of Mississippi, findings indicated a significant variance between victims and non-victims of bullying behavior and depression. Utilizing the Children’s Depression Inventory scale, Seal and Young (2003) found a mean of 15.6 and a standard deviation of 8.3 for victims, and a mean of 9.1 and a standard deviation of 6.4 for non-victims, highlighting the negative impact of victim related depression and the negative impact on the health and well being of youth.
According to Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) bullying victimization has been a problem for the past 30 years and continues to be a serious threat to healthy child development. Despite efforts made for schools to adopt anti-bullying programs (as mentioned earlier) in order to address the problem and secure the well being of youth within the school setting, the problem remains along with the threat of damaging the healthy development of youth. In fact, several years after the adoption of anti-bullying programs within the school setting, a nationwide study discovered that 26% of girls and 16% of boys who reported being victimized by peers from bullying behavior were also suffering from moderate to severe depression, significantly effecting their well being (Greenya, 2005).

Of interest and directly related are the finding of Berger (2006), in which the importance of friendship and peer groups were highlighted as an essential cornerstone in an individual’s life span. In essence, Berger’s (2006) findings delineate the fact that the missing foundations of peer friendship and peer support are an essential component for healthful development. Moreover, if peer support and healthy friendships are found to be absent then the door is left open for feelings of rejection, neglect, and/or worthlessness, all of which are perpetuated by bullying victimization. In a related study by Bhatia and Bhatia (2007) it was found that when rejection and/or neglect are present, healthy peer relations are interrupted and damaged, consequently paving the way to depression and marking the youth as an easier target for chronic victimization. In addition, Bhatia and
Bhatia (2007) argue that stressful life events (such as peer victimization) can be extremely taxing for adolescents, causing an increase in symptoms of depression. Despite efforts to effectively address the issue of bullying victimization, repeat offenses targeting the vulnerable continue to persist. In fact, Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, and Gould (2007) argue that youth who are frequently bullied and victimized in school (due in ineffective interventions) are more likely to be depressed as opposed to those who were never victims at all. In Klomek and colleagues’ study, sampling 2,342 New York State high school students, it was found that 29.5% of frequently bullied victims suffer from depression, in contrast to 7.3% who were never victims. In a similar study and in support of the aforementioned findings, Lund et al. (2008) reported that bullying among youth has been linked to high symptom loads of depression, with those being victimized developing more depressive symptoms then those who are not. According to their study, in which they surveyed 2,315 youth participants of both middle and high school (approximately seven years after the adoption of the anti-bullying programs), findings indicated that 13.3% of the sampled population reported being impacted by depressive symptoms with a higher intensity, in comparison to 7.9% who were not. In addition 10.4% indicated that they not only experienced depression stemming from being bullied at school, but also continued to suffer well past the initial experience.

In a continued effort to bring awareness to the issue and its unfavorable affects, Aludee et al. (2008) reported that youth who become frequent and chronic victims from
bullying behavior are at an alarming risk for suicidal behavior as a result of being depressed, with very few receiving services to help counter these self defeating and self destructive behaviors. Within their nationwide study, Aluede and colleagues found that 30% of school aged children who are being bullied are experiencing chronic emotional problems (such as depression) stemming from verbal or physical attacks by peers. Furthermore, it was also discovered that 3 to 5% of adolescent children who are bullied are impacted by major depression, severely impacting their development, school performance, and peer and family relations.

Severe consequences like that of depression are continuing to interrupt the lives of school aged youth deemed victims of bullying behavior; still little has been done, ultimately resulting in continued findings reflecting negative outcomes. According to Borntrager et al. (2009), they found within their study that peer rejection and victimization was still a problem. In addition, they also noted that the identified victims who were being rejected by their peers were identified as being lonely, having low self esteem, and were at a much greater risk for having internalizing disorders like that of depression.

With such compelling findings on the destructive outcomes of bullying victimization, it is without question as to why this maladaptive behavior has had such a profound impact on the lives of youth (both nationally and abroad) finding themselves targeted. Referencing a study conducted by McMahon, Reulback, Keeley, Perry, and Arensman (2010), sampling 1,870 adolescent boys in Europe, participating in a child and
adolescent self harm case study, a strong association between bullying victims and
depression was found, with a p-value of .001, and confidence intervals of 1.07 and 1.15,
respectively. Additionally, Sourander et al. (2007) surveyed 2,088 Norwegian students
from 44 secondary schools, finding a positive and moderate association between bullying
and victims suffering from depression. It is the direct result of frequent victimization that
bullying victims find themselves at particular risk of adverse long-term affects (such as
psychiatric disorders) on into early adulthood. In fact, Sourander and colleagues
identified within their study that 28% percent of the youth surveyed to be at a continued
risk for struggling with psychiatric disorders well past their adolescent years.

It is clear from these findings that the pervasiveness of depression as an adverse
psychosocial affect of bullying has and continues to be a serious issue amongst bullied
youth. With this in mind, an argument can be made in regards to the overall
ineffectiveness of anti-bullying programs since their inception into the school systems,
along with their inability to effectively address the adverse affects that accompany
bullying behavior.

Anxiety

Paralleling the damaging affects of depression and considered as another adverse
affect of bullying victimization is the similarly harmful affect of anxiety. According to
the American Psychiatric Association (2000), anxiety is recognized through a clinical
scope as a behavior cued by worrying due to thoughts of exposure to a situation causing
stimuli to recall the stressor (in this case the stress from being bullied). In a study on
bullying victimization, Rigby (2000) found, after sampling 845 adolescent youth from coeducational secondary schools in Australia, that there was a positive correlation between victimization and anxiety, with a significance level of \( p<0.001 \). In fact some studies have found victims of bullying behavior to have reported feelings of anxiety around attending school, especially after experiencing being bullied, further signaling its profound negative affect (Aluede et al., 2008).

As it relates to well being of youth within the school setting, studies indicate that youth struggling with bouts of anxiety also struggle with obtaining and maintaining healthy relationships and academic performance. In a study conducted by Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, and Rimpela (2000) sampling 8,787 Finnish adolescent youth ages 14-16, a positive association between bullying victimization and anxiety was found with 10.8% of the girls and 6.4% of the boys reporting having suffered from anxiety as a result of being bullied, as well as struggling overall within their academic setting.

As it relates to the victimized youth, this detrimental and harmful affect hinders the ability to function equally amongst peers, and has proven to significantly disrupt academic success and overall well being. According to Bond, Cartlin, Thomas, Rubin, and Patton (2001), findings within their study sampling middle school students 13 years of age in Victoria Australia, indicated that 16% of the youth who reported symptoms of anxiety as a result of being bullied also reported a decrease in their academic performance. In addition, in a related nationwide study a few years after the inception of anti-bullying school programs, a positive association was found between victims of
bullying behavior and internalizing disorders such as anxiety (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Also found within Smokowski and Kopasz’s (2005) study is the fact that one in five middle school students avoid using the restrooms out of fear and anxiety of being bullied. In addition their study also revealed that approximately 20% of all students surveyed reported to be frightened and experiencing anxiety throughout most of their school day, negatively impacting their well being and academic performance.

With a lack of effective interventions in place, studies as recent as 2008 continue to show the relentless and negative affects of bullying victimization as it relates to the adverse affects of anxiety. In support of this is the study by Gruber and Fineran (2008) where it was found that youth who are chronically victimized by bullying behavior are subject to internalizing behaviors like that of anxiety, effecting their ability to function with any level of confidence. Furthermore, within their study sampling 522 middle school students from Michigan, it was discovered that 20% of students who reported being victimized by bullying behavior scored within the clinical range on a standard depression and anxiety measure, delineating the significant impact that this antagonistic behavior has.

One year later, studies continue to show the persistence of youth experiencing anxiety as a result of bullying. According to Due, Trab Damsgaard, Lund, and Holstein (2009), from their longitudinal study of 847 Finland youth ages 15 through 18, it was found that 20.2% of those surveyed reported struggling with anxiety and poor mental health as a result of being bullied and victimized. Borntrager et al. (2009) found that
victims of bullying behavior tend to exhibit feelings of depression, anxiousness and insecurities, as well as withdrawn like behavior, causing the victim to feel lonely, sensitive, and suffer from low self esteem and social stigmatization. As previously discussed, markers of difference, stigmatization, and/or qualities deemed as undesirable within the culture of bullying (i.e. sensitivity, timidity, withdrawnness) subject students embodying said characteristics to victimization, in turn perpetuating both bullying attacks and the behavior warranting the attacks. It is implied then, that stress and anxiety related symptoms resulting from bullying compound the condition and serve as reagents for continued victimization.

With issues of anxiety plaguing those who are victimized by this imbalance of power, the ability to function normally and ward off bullying attempts has shown to be significantly impaired, causing the victim to be passive and non responsive and a target for chronic victimization. McMahon et al. (2010) found a strong correlation between victims of bullying behavior and anxiety, with a p-value of <.001 and a confidence interval of 1.13 -1.20. Their findings suggest that victims that suffer from distress and peer rejection experience issues of anxiety and the associated risk of self-harm and chronic victimization.

These finding not only indicate the rate and severity at which youth are experiencing anxiety as a result of bullying behaviors, but also allude to the persistence of these issues over time, regardless of anti-bullying measures. This inadequacy in
addressing the behavior permits the suffering of youth from the debilitating affects of anxiety as well as other mental health issues.

**Suicidal Ideations and Behaviors**

Of the data relating to the adverse psychosocial affects identified by the authors, perhaps most concerning are the studies indicating that these marginalized youth in some cases engage in suicidal ideations and suicidal behaviors as a result of being bullied and victimized. In a closer examination of the terms, suicidal ideations are defined as cognitions ranging from passive wishes of one’s own death, to the absolute planning of suicide. In contrast, suicidal behaviors are defined as an individual’s actual attempts to fulfill his or her ideations (Vrshek-Schallhorn, Czarlinski, Mineka, Zinbarg, & Craske, 2011). In addition, Vrshek-Schallhorn et al., (2011) reports that this self-destructive behavior is recognized as the third leading cause of death among older adolescent youth in the United States.

According to research findings, victims of bullying behavior demonstrate significantly higher mean scores in the areas of depression and suicidal thoughts than those who have not been bullied. In fact, in a study sampling 2,088 13-year-old Norwegian middle school students, a mean score of 1.09 was found in the area of depressive symptoms for victims of bullying behavior, as oppose to 0.54 for those who reported not being bullied at all. In addition, the same study found a higher mean score of 0.79 in the area of suicidal thoughts for victims of bullying, in comparison to 0.23 for those who had not been bullied at all. Additionally, the study also yielded an even higher
mean score of 0.92 in the area of suicidal thoughts for bullies; a score deemed significantly higher than reported for victims (Roland, 2002b).

Concurring research indicates that bullying victimization has been associated with poor mental health and self-harm behavior, significantly impacting the well being of those effected. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) found significant associations between chronic harassment by peers, bully victimization, the depression it leads to, and the suicidal ideations and behaviors that can potentially occur as a result. In conjunction with this study are the findings by Schafer et al., (2004), finding that victimization within the school setting has important negative correlations and consequences related to significant depression, low self esteem, and psychosomatic disorders including suicidal ideations. In fact, within their study sampling 192 respondents, it was noted that 9% reported considering harming themselves as a result of being bullied and 13% reported feeling the same on more then one occasion. Even more concerning (due to its chronic nature and foundation in identity formation) is the fact that the study suggests that direct experiences of victimization stemming from being bullied at school account for recurrent memories and suicidal ideations, ultimately negatively affecting the quality of life, specifically in the area of self-perception.

Additionally, in a related national study on the prevalence of this harmful affect amongst school aged youth, it was found that one in five high school students seriously contemplate suicide due to emotional distress brought on by chronic victimization (Hosansky, 2004). Moreover studies have found an increased prevalence of suicidal
ideation among both victims and bullies, with victims being more likely to attempt suicide as a result of chronic bullying victimization. In support of this are the findings in a study conducted from 2002 through 2004, covering six New York State High Schools, surveying 2,342 students, indicating 20.5% of males and 46.3% of females reported struggling with high levels of depression as a result of being bullied, which in many cases has led to suicidal ideations and attempts according to the study. In addition, the findings also indicated that 7.7% of the males and 12.5% of the females suffering from depression as a result of being bullied had serious suicidal ideations, whereas 5.1% of the males and 17.1% of the females actually engaged in suicidal attempts in comparison to those who were never victimized at all (Klomek et al., 2007).

The aforementioned results are alarming considering the fact that anti-bullying programs are said to be in full affect. Even more concerning is the fact that in a nationwide study conducted a year later surveying middle-school students, it was found that 8% of girls and 4% of boys who are victims of bullying behavior are more likely to be suicidal, denoting the pervasiveness of the problem (Aluede et al., 2008).

Various studies suggests that victims of bullying behavior are closely linked to poor mental health and that these sometimes isolated and more often chronic attacks can be viewed as a negative life event, decreasing ones wellness and contributing to the development of self-harm. Moreover, it has also been noted that youth who have been bullied in the school setting are at an increased risk for self-harm and suicidal ideations both in schools in the U.S., and abroad. In fact, in a European study it was found that
27.1% of those who reported being bullied had thoughts of self harm – as much as four times higher than those who stated that they had not been bullied at all (McMahon et al., 2010).

Alarmingly enough, less than one year ago it was reported by Vrshek-Schallhorn et al. (2011) that youth who were victimized by bullying behavior engaged in suicidal ideation and were 11 times more likely to attempt suicide then those who did not, verifying the sustained impact of bullying victimization and its adverse affects. These finding are especially important for the reasons of understanding just how pervasive this behavior and its adverse affect are in the lives of youth within the school setting.

**Social Stigmatization and Low Self-Esteem**

Kurzban and Leary (2001) define stigmatization as the process by which individuals who satisfy certain criteria come to be excluded from various kinds of social interactions. Schafer et al. (2004) argue that retrospective studies show that bullying usually focuses on a specific population. When a specific person or population is identified and bullied, the resulting behaviors are inherently stigmatizing to the victim(s), as by very nature, they disqualify the victim(s) from full social acceptance. In a study investigating social rejection and social prominence among elementary students, Farmer, Hall, Leung, Estell, and Brooks (2011) found that 34.0% of boys labeled as having low social prominence were identified as rejected among peers. Additionally, 22.5% of boys labeled as having medium social prominence were identified as rejected among peers. Of those boys labeled as having high social prominence, only 10.6% were labeled as socially
rejected. In the investigation of the relationship between social prominence and identification of students as bullies, victims, or bully victims, the data suggests that those students who are identified as rejected among peers are also likely to be identified as victims of bullying or bully victims. 25.4% of male elementary students labeled as having low social prominence were identified as a victim of bullying, and 56.3% of low social prominent males were identified as bully-victims. It should be noted that the study found among high socially prominent ranked male students, zero students were identified as victims. Similar proportions were found among females.

A prominent example of this type of social identification and subsequent rejection of a specific population by bullies can be seen in youth with disabilities. Schoen and Schoen (2010) argue that bullying behavior occurs across a myriad of disability types. According to Aluede et al. (2008), in a study related to bullying behavior and the victimization of youth with disabilities showed a 25% sample of mainstream students that were bullied in comparison to 67% of special needs student. One such example can be seen in weight-based social stigmatization and victimization among youth. Gray et al. (2009) report that obese youth suffer a decrease in emotional well being and psychological functioning, along with greater symptoms of loneliness. The authors cite that “approximately 50% of obese boys and 58% of obese girls report experiencing significant problems with their peers” (Warschburger, 2005).

From feelings of devaluation, imposed by the bully or the dominant group, victims of long-standing, negative behavior are rendered helpless and therefore viewed as
weak and undesirable. Moreover, studies show that the bullied population is typically the weaker of the two, further perpetuating the stigmatization of the victim(s) (Barreto & Ellemers, 2010). McMahon et al. (2010) indicate that victims of bullying not only suffer distress, but social marginalization as well, lowering their status amongst their peers, perpetuating low self esteem and the feelings of stigmatization. The study found a significant association between school bullying victimization among boys, reported self esteem issues, and difficulty making and keeping friends (OR .88 and 5.64, respectively).

Ultimately the stigmatization and lowered self esteem that stems from being bullied is seen not solely in the mere labeling of an individual or segment of society as victim(s), but rather it lies with the negative stereotypical connotations that derive from the label itself. According to research, the mere labeling of a victim, in and of its self, can potentially create and perpetuate negative side affects on other aspects of individual functioning. Victims of stigmatization as a result of being bullied can suffer from systematic underperformance, both educationally and in the work setting as an adult, making it tough for victims to gain access to valued resources related to educational and career success (Baretto & Ellemers, 2010).

Constant bullying and stigmatization by peers can be seen as both threatening and humiliating. It is this type of negative behavior fostered by prejudice and discriminatory beliefs that may lead to cases of harassment and in extreme cases, violence. It has been noted that victims may be physically assaulted, verbally humiliated, or actively excluded from a group, resulting in isolation, loneliness, and the label of being identified as weak
or a loner (Roland, 2002b). For example, in a study on homophobic bullying among youth, Chan (2009) cites that research shows two-thirds of attackers in school shootings felt “persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident.”

Integral in the discussion of social stigmatization is that of the affects of bullying on an individual’s self-esteem. Victims are affected by the implied devaluation of their self-concept, having a direct affect on one’s own self-views, resulting in the limitations opportunities and outcomes. Seal and Young (2003) suggest that victims of bullying behavior manifest lower levels of self-esteem, as well experience negative impacts on their psychological and physical well-being. This becomes particularly relevant when considering self-esteem to be one of the variables in life with the greatest potential for inhibitory or promotional influence on health behaviors (Geckil & Dundar, 2011). Adolescents in this study were found to have a significant inverse correlation between self-esteem scores and high-risk behavior scores ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$).

In discussing bullying and mental health issues, Roland (2002a) suggests that through the process of being repeatedly bullied, victims may begin to realize their own identity as being a victim of bullying; this may result in the victim believing that there is something wrong with his or her self, consequently leading to lower levels of reported self-esteem. Jankauskiene, Kardelis, Sukys, and Kardeliene (2008) investigated psychosocial factors associated with school bullying among pupils from the 6th, 8th, and 11th grades of schools in Lithuania. 35.3% of students involved in bullying reported low self-esteem, 44.7% of students who identified as victims reported having low levels of
self-esteem, and 17.6% of students who identified as bullies reported having low self-esteem.

It is through this type of repeated aggression that victims of bullying find themselves struggling to cope and fit in with the rest of their peers, attempting to manage their self-concept and identity. Schafer et al. (2004) argues that this debilitating experience has also been reported to hinder the trust needed for a healthy relationship, particularly in terms of self-confidence or self-esteem. Geckil and Dundar (2011) report that in a study examining health risk behaviors and self esteem, sampling 1,361 students, found that 55.8% of participants report low self esteem due to poor peer relations; indicating that issues of self esteem become relevant when victimization is present. Additionally, within the same study Chi-Square tests indicated that both males and females struggled equally in terms of low-self esteem issues resulting from being bullied.

Recent Developments

Bullying behavior has, in recent years, been taken to another level by way of covert methods. Research indicates that covert methods of bullying behavior include social, relational, and indirect aggression. Catanzaro (2011) refers to indirect aggression as an escalating problem, especially aggression utilizing the modalities of social networking, texting, email and Facebook postings. The study also notes these modalities of indirect bullying to particularly prevalent amongst adolescent girls.

It has been suggested that indirect bullying encompasses social manipulation in which the aggressor makes use of the social structure in order to harm the identified
target (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006). The terms social and relational are similar in nature with premises being the direct absence of the perpetrator. From this type of manipulative behavior the bully’s peer group allows for the aggressor to hide behind his or her peer group, ultimately reducing the probability for the victim to rise up and defend or retaliate. Furthermore, an increase in the possibility that other members of the bully’s peer group may attack the victim also creates an added indirect act of aggression (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006).

Studies show that in terms of indirect bullying behavior, boys are more likely to engage in direct bullying, whereas girls tend to be more involved in indirect bullying (Wang et al., 2009). In terms of physical bullying, the study reported 18.1% of males to engage in bullying behaviors, while only 8.8% of females engaged in such behaviors. However, in terms of relational bullying, 26.8% of males engaged, while 27.5% of females engaged. With the increase in cell phone and computer internet technology, indirect bullying behavior has taken on a new, much more aggressive and damaging form; a more sophisticated manner of bullying in an indirect and covert way known as cyber bullying. The study found 9.7% of males to engage in cyber bullying behaviors, and 7.1% of females.

Cyber bullying can encompass a large range of behaviors. Research has identified cyber bullying to include the use of computers, cell phones, social networking, and other technology used to threaten or humiliate others, putting young people risk and in some cases with deadly consequences. Furthermore, this form of electronic aggression
has been deemed an emerging public health problem by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Billitteri, 2008). According to Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols and Storch (2009), cyberspace used as a social network has created a new vehicle for youth to become victims of peer aggression and bullying behavior. Within their study it is noted that an estimated 90% of youth use the Internet, with 50% using it on a daily basis. Smith et al. (2008) broadly define cyber bullying as bullying using mobile phones and the internet. However, other research has found more specific themes and modalities in terms of the behaviors. Menesini, Nocentini, and Calussi (2011) sampled 1,092 Italian adolescents in an effort to analyze the severity and aggression of various forms of cyber bullying. Findings indicated the less severe acts to include “silent/prank calls and insults on instant messaging,” while most severe acts of cyber bullying included “unpleasant pictures/photos on web sites, phone pictures/photos/videos of intimate scenes, and phone pictures/photos/videos of violent scenes.” Moderate levels of severity were found to include “nasty text messages, nasty or rude e-mails, insults on Web sites, insults in chatrooms, and insults on blogs.”

In a study conducted by Wang et al. (2009), it was found that boys are more likely to engage cyber bullying as the bully and girls were more likely to be the victims. In fact the study sampling 7,182 adolescent youth grades 6-10 from Maryland, reported that 9.7% of boys in comparison to 7.1% of girls reported to be engaging in cyber bulling. Nevertheless, cyber bullying whether perpetrated by a boy or girl still creates victims with equal if not more detrimental and damaging affects as traditional bullying.
In study questioning 124 sixth grade students, Accordino and Accordino (2011) cite Kowalski and Limber’s (2007) findings, reporting between an 11 and 16% prevalence in cyber bullying. The study found 13% of participants reported being cyber bullied an average of .52 times (SD=1.85). Thirty-two percent of participants admitted to bullying another person, and 32% of students reported feeling cyber bullying was a problem in the middle school. The study proposes disinhibition, composed of such phenomena as the sense of invisibility, a lack of visual feedback relating to the pain inflicted by cyber bullying behavior, and the supporting mechanism of normalized online misbehavior, to be a primary factor contributing to the alarming rates of cyber bullying. Other studies propose similar ideas: Berger (2006) argues that difference between bullying and cyber bullying is the fact that technology separates the bully and the victim, causing for an increase in cyber bullies and the victims they create three to one.

In a nationwide study, it was found that roughly a third of teens who use the internet reported receiving threatening messages, aggressive text messages, e-mails containing embarrassing pictures, and on line rumors without consent (Billitteri, 2008). In a similar study investigating the impacts of cyber bullying on secondary school pupils, Smith et al. (2008) cite Oliver and Candappa’s (2003) study sampling middles school students ages 12-13 in the U.K., reporting 4% had received bullying text messages, and 2% had received nasty email messages.

In investigating the co-occurrence of both school and cyber bullying, Schneider et al. (2012) cite a 2008 school-based census of more than 20,000 youth, reporting that
33.9% of cyber victims experience symptoms of depression, 18.1% experience suicidal ideations, and 9.4% engaging in suicide attempts. Of those students who report victimization of both school and cyber bullying, 47.0% experience symptoms of depression, 30.0% experience suicidal ideations, and 15.2% engage in suicide attempts. These findings not only display the alarming prevalence and detrimental consequences of this latest evolution in bullying behavior, but also suggest the increasing rates in which youth are participating in cyber bullying in recent years.

With the growth of technology, cyberbullying and its negative affects are beginning to rival that of traditional bullying behavior. In a study conducted by the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes against Children’s Research Center, it was found that 1 out of every 17 youth between the ages of 10 and 17 were harassed and or threatened while on line (Sparling, 2004).
Chapter 3

METHODS

This chapter describes the research methods used to complete this Master’s Project. The first section describes the study design in which a qualitative method was used. In the second section the researchers explain the data collection procedures used to collect data for the research Project. Data collection procedures also included the process of applying for the protection of human subjects. The third section encompasses an illustration of the type of data collection instruments used, as well as how the data was gathered. The fourth section discusses the data analysis plan for the research study.

Study Design

This research study applied a qualitative study design, gathering archival research to identify the trends in prevalence of the adverse psychosocial effects of school bullying. By definition, the study design was a combination of both exploratory and explanatory design, as they were used to examine the interconnectedness of two or more factors, as well as to inquire and assess what the researchers felt to have been an understudied topic in terms of the continuance of the adverse affects as they relate to the behavior (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2009).

Specifically, through the referencing of various archival research studies conducted over the last 20 years, this study confirmed the association and evaluated the continuance of bullying behavior and the adverse affects of depression, anxiety, suicidal
ideations and suicidal behavior, low self esteem, and social stigmatization. The researchers also endeavored to analyze the trends of the various psychosocial effects as they appear in the literature, specifically in terms of identifying those affects appearing with the most frequency. Finally, the researchers attempted to summarize and present the demographic variables of age and gender, as well as sample size as they relate to the participants of the studies utilized in the content analysis.

**Sampling Procedures**

For the purpose of this study, the type of sampling procedure utilized was availability sampling in terms of available related archival research using the data bases included in the California Sacramento State University library Eureka catalog system, Google, and Google Scholar. All of the searches were conducted between the months of September 2011 and February 2012. According to Rubin and Babbie (2007), availability sampling is the type of sampling that allows for human subjects to be picked based on their availability and convenience. With this in mind it is important to understand that this type of sampling method is sometimes considered to be risky due to the risk of being bias. However, it should be noted that this type of sampling is the type that is used primarily in social work research (Rubin et. al., 2007).

**Instruments and Data Collection**

Due to this project’s utilization of archival research, no questionnaires, surveys, or interviews were conducted. However, the researchers did utilize electronic records to collect, store, and organize the collected data. To assist in this process, the researchers
collaborated in creating a data collection form in Microsoft Word, organized according to the categories of depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self esteem, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior. Studies containing discussions related to these variables were input into their respective categories during the data collection process.

Focal points for the purpose of this study centered on reviewing and studying archival research data that would allow the researchers to determine whether or not bullying victimization and the numerous psychosocial issues under investigation are continuing to occur. For example, archival research was reviewed for the determination that bullying victimization and the depressive symptoms caused by this behavior are still occurring. Using the same method, archival data was investigated for possible continuance of bullying victimization and issues of: anxiety, suicidal ideations and suicidal behavior, low self-esteem, and social stigmatization.

After a review of the collected archival research, the data was then sorted to the corresponding areas of focus for the purpose of evaluation and determination of whether or not any of the targeted areas of study can be identified as a continued adverse consequence of bullying victimization. The researchers were the sole collectors and reviewers of the gathered research covering a collective span of time from September 5th, 2011 and February 21st, 2012.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitatively, the frequency of the appearance of the identified psychosocial variables were documented and utilized to describe the number of occurrences. Basic
descriptive statistics were used to provide a more detailed understanding of the data collected. Qualitative data was analyzed through the independent reviews of the identified literature by the researchers and recorded utilizing Microsoft word, then compared and contrasted in order to compile the common and unique trends, patterns, and directions of the data. The researchers used descriptive statistics to summarize and analyze the data within the consulted studies. As a result, the probability level in terms of whether or not the continuance of bullying victimization and the aforementioned adverse effects still being seen as a significant problem amongst school aged youth was determined.

In conducting the data analysis, the researchers first compiled all the literature referenced in writing this study, and identified those studies specifically relating to bullying behavior among school aged youth. The researchers then divided those studies, to be reviewed independently. Each researcher thoroughly investigated their respective studies, utilizing Microsoft Word to keep notes, and identifying key considerations and frequency of appearance of the psychosocial variables of inquiry. Finally, the researchers compiled notes to perform a comprehensive assessment of the collected data.

Protection of Human Subjects

For the purpose of this project, the researchers submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University Sacramento (CSUS) for the protection of human subjects. The CSUS IRB committee approved the application on December 19, 2011. The human subject approval number is 11-12-039. It should be
noted that due to this study solely relying on archival research, there was no need to address issues of confidentiality, anonymity, or informed consent causing the study to be of low to minimal risk.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter examines the results of the study. Discussions begin with the overall findings of the content analysis, including descriptions of the methods used to obtain the consulted literature (i.e. variables of inquiry, inclusion criteria), an analysis of disciplines represented, and a frequency distribution related to the psychosocial variables appearing in the various literature. Next, specific findings are discussed in terms of descriptive statistics used to summarize and analyze the content of the studies meeting the inclusion criteria. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results of the investigation.

Overall Findings

In total, including those omitted, there were 72 secondary data sources reviewed by the researchers. Studies were extracted from several locations, including the California State University, Sacramento Library, its online database, and the Google Scholar online database and Internet. Literature included in the study encompassed internet journal publications, peer-reviewed articles, books, and internet article publications. Selection criteria was based on topics covering school bullying behaviors among youth, as well as studies focusing on associations of victimization with the following variables: depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self esteem, suicidal ideations and suicidal behaviors. The researchers used several keywords in finding and selecting the consulted literature for the content analysis, including school, bullying,
depression, anxiety, stigmatization, self-esteem, and suicide. These keywords were found either in the title or content of the articles selected. The researchers then sorted results by year, and selected the final collection of literature based on relevance to the research purpose in the last 20 years. Consulted literature was obtained from social science disciplines, medical research, or expert articles (i.e. doctors, educators, researchers, parents, and even victims and/or perpetrators).

Appendix A provides a list of the literature organized according to the field of discipline responsible for conducting each study. Sectioned accordingly with respect for each represented discipline, the researchers identified and listed within Appendix A seven total fields of discipline from which the researchers obtained literature. Included within the list are the following: 9 articles from the Medical filed, 12 articles from the filed of Education, 22 articles from the filed of Psychology, 12 articles from the Behavior of Social Science, 8 articles representing Children and Adolescent, 6 articles containing Reviews, and 4 articles from Legal and Policy.

In addition, within the study conducted, a retrieval of survey data from a selection of the literature (those studies pertaining to school bullying and one or more of the identified variables under investigation) was analyzed. Initially, data was evaluated for descriptive statistics. This information was used to check for errors in the data entry process, any outliers that might skew or otherwise misrepresent the data, and missing data. The secondary data sources were organized for cleanup to identify the useable source that fit the criteria of inclusion of one or more of the variables selected for this
study, i.e. depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideations and behaviors. From the 72 studies, only 23 studies met the inclusion criteria, ranging in publication year from 1996 to 2012. Information from the frequency distribution of the content analysis is summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1

*Frequency Distribution by Variable*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Social Stigmatization</th>
<th>Low Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Suicidal Ideations</th>
<th>Suicidal Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accordino &amp; Accordino (2011)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhatia &amp; Bhatia (2007)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds &amp; Stoker (2000)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowes, et al. (2010)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chibbaro (2007)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross, et al. (2011)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dannon &amp; Hammond (2007)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dempsey, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgiou (2008)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gray, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawker &amp; Boulton (2000)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jankauskiene, et al. (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurzban &amp; Leary (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murray &amp; Lopez (1996)</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nesdale, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Higgins-Norman, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ojala and Nesdale (2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ridgeway (1997)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schneider, et al. (2012)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sidanuis, et al. (2004)</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strauss, (2005)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vrshek-Schallhorn, et al. (2011)</td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>

| Totals                                    | 15         | 12      | 8                     | 12              | 16                 | 12                 |
It is apparent in the above table that a majority of the studies consulted contained discussions related to more than one of the variables of inquiry. In fact, of the 23 studies satisfying the inclusion criteria, a median and mode of four variables were found. This may imply the interconnectedness of these psychosocial phenomena experienced by youth, and begs several inquiries: how might these effects relate to and influence each other? Are youth experiencing several of these effects concurrently? In addition, could treatment of one variable elicit improvement in another? For example, low self-esteem may be a contributing factor in youth’s suicidal ideations, making suicidal ideations more difficult to attribute directly to bullying victimization. It is conceivable that treating low self-esteem in victimized youth could reduce suicidal ideations. Similar arguments could be made regarding the relatedness of other psychosocial impacts.

Also of note in the above table are the five studies focusing attention on only one variable. This may imply that the literature to this point has placed increased significance on self-esteem and social stigmatization as they relate to bullying behaviors. These studies may also skew the deduction that suicidal ideations and depression pose the greatest psychosocial risks faced by youth, as the emphasis given these variables within their respective studies may compensate for the fewer number of studies addressing them.

The fact that 49 studies failed to satisfy the inclusion criteria suggests that only a fraction of the last 20 years of research on school bullying (that was reviewed by these researchers) has been devoted to its psychosocial effects. For example, the most prominently discussed variable of suicidal ideations was found in only 22% of the
literature consulted. Social stigmatization (a variable noted in the literature to possess potential for increasingly effective intervention) was discussed in only 11% of the literature consulted. Furthermore, as it relates to the years of publications, the researchers found both a median and mode of the year 2008. Considering the earliest publication consulted was in 1996, the researchers’ findings indicate that considerations for psychosocial effects of bullying are a relatively recent phenomenon in the research.

Specific Findings

For the purpose of this study, the researchers chose to use two tables to display the specific findings of the 32% (n=23) of the studies that met with viable correlations to this study’s variables (depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self-esteem, suicidal ideations, and/or suicidal behaviors). The first, Characteristics of the Studies Included With Data (table 2), displays the 57% (n=13) of studies reporting some correlation, connections, or statistical analysis. Table 2 provides comparative data on the variables of inquiry, as well as their sample populations, variables of investigation and major findings. The second table, Characteristics of the Studies Included With No Data (table 3), displays the 43% (n=10) of studies reporting no specific data (i.e. statistical analysis, tests, or results). Table 3 provides to study design/subject, variables of investigation, and major findings.
### Table 2

**Characteristics of the Studies Included With Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Variables Investigated</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accordino &amp; Accordino (2011)</td>
<td>124 6th grade students</td>
<td>Bullying experience, Parental relationships, Past coping mechanisms</td>
<td>Close parental relationships produced less bullying; Those cyberbullied were bullied more frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds &amp; Stoker (2000)</td>
<td>2,559 13 &amp; 14 year old students</td>
<td>Recurrent victimization, Anxiety, Depression</td>
<td>16-20% of victimized youth reported symptoms of anxiety and depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowes, et al. (2010)</td>
<td>2,232 10-12 year old same-sex twins (1116 twin sets)</td>
<td>Bullying experience, Emotional &amp; behavioral problems, Resiliency</td>
<td>Family factors were often associated with resilience to being bullied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chibbaro (2007)</td>
<td>3,767 middle school students</td>
<td>Prevalence of cyberbullying</td>
<td>41.3% of those bullied at school also engaged in bullying other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross, et al. (2011)</td>
<td>947 4th grade students</td>
<td>Prevalence of bullying, Friendly Schools program</td>
<td>No differences found for self-reported perpetration of bullying, confirming the efficacy of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dempsey, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>1,684 11-16 year old public school students</td>
<td>Frequency of cyberbullying, Depression, Anxiety</td>
<td>Cyberbullying is not synonymous with overt and relational bullying; Cyberbullying can lead to anxiety but not depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiou (2008)</td>
<td>253 4th, 5th, &amp; 6th grade students</td>
<td>Maternal characteristics, Youth’s experience of victimization</td>
<td>Maternal responsiveness was positively related to youth’s school adjustment and negatively related to school aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jankausiene, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>1162 6th, 8th, &amp; 11th grade students</td>
<td>Bullying behavior, Self-esteem, Happiness, Family/Teachers Rel, Alcohol &amp; drug use</td>
<td>Victimization was most associated with grade level, boys, lower self esteem, unhappiness and family teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesdale, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>85 7&amp;9 year old children</td>
<td>Group norms, Direct/indirect bullying intentions</td>
<td>Regardless of in-group norms, youth displayed more positive attitudes toward the in-group than the out-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojala and Nesdale (2004)</td>
<td>120 10-13 year old male students</td>
<td>Attitudes toward bullying behavior, In-group norms</td>
<td>In-group characteristics were more likely to be obtained when associated with current norms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researchers found it interesting to note that within the already limited studies, an even more limited selection was made available with prudent statistics. With this in mind, questions as to why more empirical studies yielding beneficial evidence have not been made, need to be asked. In addition, the lack of representation in terms of data analysis speaks volumes in terms of necessary data needed for impactful improvements. From the available 13 studies the researchers were also able to identify a median and mode. In fact the researcher identified a mode of 4, recognizing the year 2008 in which the majority of the acknowledged studies derived from. Moreover, a median was identified within the studies in which the researchers concluded the median to be the year 2008, indicating the middle year (value) of the combined 13 studies.

The researchers identified a trend amongst the 13 studies with findings suggesting a heavier concentration in the areas of cyberbullying and the prevalence of bullying behavior. It was noted that each were mentioned in 4 studies, followed by depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Schneider, et al. (2012)       | 20,268 9th-12th grade students | - School bullying  
- Cyberbullying  
- Psychological distress  
- 16% reported cyberbullying  
- 26% reported victimization in the last year  
- 60% reported victimization at one point |
| Smith, et al. (2008)           | 625 11-16 year old students | - General internet use  
- Cyberbullying on and off school campus  
- Both groups reported less cyberbullying than traditional bullying  
- Increased internet use was related to increased victimization |
| Vrshek-Schallhorn, et al. (2011) | 117 youth Emotion Project Participants | - Suicidal ideation  
- Depressive episodes  
- Both genders reported social circle problems during depressive episodes  
- Baseline extroversion inversely predicted suicidal ideations (male only) |
mentioned in 2, and anxiety along with self esteem both mentioned in 1 study. Of interest was the fact that the researchers did not find any studies within the 13 that addressed social stigmatization or suicidal behaviors or ideations. Furthermore, the researchers found a heavier focus of studies sampling children between the ages of 6 and 13 with four studies reflecting this sampled population. In addition, a total of 2 studies represented middle school students with ages ranging between 13 and 14, 3 studies representing both middle and high school students ages 13-16, 1 study representing only high school students ages 14-18. From these findings, the researchers were able to conclude a deficiency in the variables studied as well as an unequal demonstration of samples represented.

Table 3

Characteristics of Studies Included With No Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Variables Investigated</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhatia &amp; Bhatia (2007)</td>
<td>- Overview of child &amp; adolescent depression</td>
<td>- Depressive symptoms - Psychosocial risk factors</td>
<td>- Affects 3-5% of children &amp; adolescents - Symptom expression may vary with developmental stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnon &amp; Hammond (2007)</td>
<td>- Youth Resiliency assessment tool overview</td>
<td>- Bullying behaviors - Youth resiliency - Strengths and protective factors - Attitudes of youth engaged in bullying</td>
<td>- Interventions focusing on perpetrators of violence, or broad based prevention strategies pathologize behaviors and create counter productive divisions within schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>- Literature review</td>
<td>- Childhood obesity - Stigmatization - Peer aggression</td>
<td>- Obesity is a highly stigmatized condition and is related to increased victimization from peer aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawker &amp; Boulton (2000)</td>
<td>- Review of cross sectional studies from 1978-97</td>
<td>- Peer victimization - Psychosocial maladjustment</td>
<td>- Victimization is most strongly related to depression; least strongly to anxiety - More research is needed concerning indirect victimization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within the review of the studies above, the researchers were able to identify a median and mode. Of the 10 studies, a shared mode between 2007 and 2009 was discovered representing two years amongst the collective studies, signifying an equal amount of studies per each year. Furthermore, a median of the collective 10 remaining studies yielded a heavier concentration of studies conducted in mid 2000. Of equal interest, the researchers also noted out of the remaining 10 studies a more profound focus of research on literature review with 5 out of the 10 reflecting this concentration. In addition, the researchers also found 1 study dealing with depression, 1 study focusing on a cross sectional study between 1978-1997, 1 study on social stigmatization, 1 study on
bullying behaviors overall impact on victims, and 1 study discussing an overview of
assessment tools and the Global Burden of Diseases.

Within this subset, the researches also noted the following trends with regards to
the variables being studied. Out of the remaining 10 studies, 4 discussed social
stigmatization, 3 discussed depression, 1 discussed suicide, and 1 discussed anxiety, and
the remaining covering various aspects of bullying behavior. These trends demonstrate
the lack of research and attention necessary for effective assessments on the adverse
effects of bullying behavior.

Summary of Results

In all, 23 studies met the inclusion criteria. 13 of these studies reported statistical
data. From those studies, it is evident that the effects of bullying victimization on youth
can increase depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self-esteem, suicidal
ideations, and suicidal behaviors. The findings of this study suggest there are many
factors that can influence the instances, duration, and effects of bullying on school-aged
children. This has been shown to have a great effect on a child’s future success,
emotional stability, and even relational dynamics. Suicidal ideation and depression were
found to likely be the greatest risk faced by victimized youth. However, more intensive
focus was given to the areas of social stigmatization and self esteem within the few
studies that addressed them, perhaps skewing the results and making generalizations
more difficult. Findings from this study also suggest the interrelatedness of the
psychosocial effects associated with school bullying, and their relatively recent focus within the body of literature.

Several themes emerged across the studies, journals, and articles meeting the inclusion criteria. These themes surrounded topics of victimization, parental influences, gender differences, social influences, and increases in depression, anxiety, social stigmatization, low self-esteem, suicidal ideations, and suicidal behaviors. In alignment with the researchers suspicion, patterns of cyclic bullying, perpetrator history of violence (personal or parental), and lingering effects when not addressed properly were identified across most of the secondary data. Cyberbullying emerged as a growing concern within the examined research, as well as the heaviest focus on youth ages 6-13. The researchers identified literature reviews as a common study design for issues surrounding school bullying, further implying the identified gap of research on adverse psychosocial effects of bullying that contribute original statistical analyses to the body of knowledge.

In all, a significant number of studies from this content analysis focused on school bullying and its adverse effects on youth; the trends and themes identified within these studies support the researchers suspicion that current and historical efforts at bullying prevention have failed to adequately address the behavior, specifically neglecting to address the concurrent psychosocial issues faced by youth.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focuses attention on the culmination of what the researchers cogitate as a problematic and suboptimal behavior. Included in the discussion is a summary of this study, the researchers thoughts on the implications for social work, and the researchers concluding remarks and recommendations to assist in the suppression of bullying behavior and its adverse psychosocial effects.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine archival research on bullying behavior and its adverse psychosocial effects, focusing on the variables of anxiety, depression, social stigmatization, low self esteem, and suicidal ideations and behaviors. The researchers wanted to determine whether or not the aforementioned adverse effects were still a factor amongst school aged youth. In addition, the researchers also wanted to determine whether or not current and historical efforts of intervention and prevention have been effective in reducing bullying behaviors, as well as the adverse psychosocial consequences resulting from such behavior. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to explore which of the psychosocial issues investigated presented the greatest risk for youth, and whether or not the victims had a voice in an arena of support.

In reviewing the literature, the researchers highlighted various studies that display findings indicative of the continuance of both the behavior of bullying and its
psychosocial consequences, despite numerous prevention and intervention programs implemented over the past twenty years of research. In analyzing the relevant literature, the researchers found that of the 72 studies consulted, the prevalence of bullying behavior and its subsequent affects displayed the following trends: eight studies included discussions related to social stigmatization, twelve included low self esteem, twelve included anxiety, twelve included suicidal behavior, fifteen included depression, and sixteen included suicidal ideation. Furthermore, thirteen studies displayed statistical data confirming the above-mentioned adverse psychosocial affects and their association with school bullying among youth. A significant number of studies displayed results indicating a definite need for more appropriate and effective interventions.

Based on these findings, the researchers confirmed their suspicions. Specifically, that bullying behavior among school aged youth has and continues to be significantly associated with all of the adverse psychosocial affects of anxiety, depression, social stigmatization, low self esteem, and suicidal ideations and behaviors. Moreover, the researchers were able to identify suicidal ideation as the most common adverse psychosocial effect discussed in the literature, implying this specific issue as the greatest psychosocial risk faced by victimized youth. Additionally, the relatively small number of studies containing discussions of the variables under investigation implies that the adverse effects of bullying behavior are under represented and overlooked. The researchers found this to be of importance as it is representative of the fact that the current anti-bullying programs are not comprehensively or effectively addressing the
issue, dealing primarily with the behavior and not the impact it has on those participating. Furthermore, the researchers found that with the rise in technology, the bullying platform has been elevated to a much more covert and equally destructive level. It is the opinion of the researchers that the evolution of Cyberbullying may account for the continuance of the behavior in spite widespread anti-bullying behavior. This medium has been shown to introduce new dynamics to the behavior (i.e. disinhibition, invisibility), and has in many ways perpetuated its continuance. The nearly universal accessibility to this platform, along with its separation from school liability and accountability has added to the already challenging task of properly addressing the issue of school bullying.

**Implications for Social Work**

According to the NASW code of ethics, the social worker’s role is to advocate and enhance the well-being of those oppressed and marginalized, developing relationships, brokering and assessing services, assessing needs, and of most importance – facilitating change. Victims of bullying behavior are amongst those in need of this type of service provided by social workers, as they have endured both physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their peers. With the growing pressure that youth have of being accepted and fitting in, along with the challenge and struggle of finding ones identity during what is arguably a critical developmental stage, the devastating consequences of being bullied lend themselves to the ethical obligation and standards of practice of social work. Therefore, the goals of the social worker may include: providing bullying victims with a safe environment and protecting them from additional harm; developing,
promoting and implementing programs to properly address these behaviors; providing psychoeducational interventions for bullies, victims, families, faculty and staff, districts and policy makers; contributing to the growing body of knowledge and research, and supporting them in a therapeutic role, as a mediator or as an advocate within the school setting and beyond.

The researchers find that the current anti-bulling programs that have been in existence for the past 10 years have proven ineffective in addressing the rate at which school aged youth are participating in bullying behaviors. While it is not always the case, more often than not the victims of this maladaptive behavior are in distress and in need of intervention and prevention services. The researchers find a lack of effort made by these programs to address the subsequent psychosocial issues faced by those involved in the behavior (both retrospectively and preventatively). It should be noted that numerous studies related to the culture of bullying contained discussions pertinent to this area, providing suggestions for more appropriate and effective programs and services. Of relevance this discourse is the profession of social work’s emphasis on cultural competence, contextual influences on behavior, power dynamics and group dynamics. This type of awareness creates an opportunity for a holistic approach in addressing bullying issues; one that the researchers have identified as an under utilized model, and one that according to the literature displays the potential for significantly increased efficacy. Therefore, social workers epitomize the experience and education necessary to construct, promote and implement such a holistic model.
It is the duty of social workers to advocate and assist those who find themselves in need. Therefore, it is important to embrace the problem as a whole and intervene at all levels. From a micro level the importance of recognizing and understanding the adverse effects is imperative in order to effectively support the victim and advocate on his or her behalf, especially within the school setting. In addition, individual and family clinical interventions would also speak to the obligations of a sound social worker, providing the necessary support for both the victim and family.

On a mezzo level the position of the social worker takes on a more front line role with efforts focused on engaging and bringing community awareness for the purpose of change. It is within this setting that the social worker can elevate the level of awareness by way of community organizing, bringing neighbors and neighborhoods together and addressing the issue and concern. Moreover, at the mezzo level the social worker can bring schools together and establish a collective approach for effective school rallies, psychoeducational student campaigns, and school and district policy development. An effective social worker can also collaborate with school administration for the purpose of encouraging the promotion of a sense of family and a sense of warmth within the staff and student body. Social workers can assist in fostering a sense of connectedness amongst staff members as well as staff and students to create a healthy and supportive environment focused on learning. The researchers found this to be of particular importance due to variables showing a decrease in bullying victimization when a connectedness within the school setting between staff and students is present.
Additionally, social workers can assist in addressing and bringing awareness to issues of power, and the power dynamics that play out amongst the student body. Finally, social workers may draw on the effectiveness of teamwork by incorporating parents and families into the intervention and prevention strategies triangulating the support by way of student, family, and school faculty.

At the macro level the role of the social worker takes on what can be arguably the most important role in terms of introducing new national school policies and amending or ratifying old ones. Social workers can also be utilized in grant writing, creating funding for the implementation of new and more holistic and comprehensive anti-bullying programs. By being involved at the macro level the social worker has the potential to facilitate positive changes at multiple school sites and setting, establishing a healthy and safe environment for students to enjoy and learn.

**Evaluation and Conclusion**

Research findings clearly indicate that the currently utilized anti-bullying programs are in need of revision. The review and analysis of the literature indicated several problematic themes found in relation to this area. The current and traditional approaches to bullying prevention programs attempt to change student attitudes that promote bullying while encouraging behaviors that prevent it. This often takes the form of paternalistic punishments placed upon perpetrators of bullying or those students exhibiting aggressive behaviors. The researchers have found that these deficit based and case specific endeavors have limited overall effectiveness, as they neglect to incorporate
several variables established in the research as significantly influential in affecting bullying behavior (i.e. group dynamics, familial influences, issues of difference, school climate).

The researchers found that the focus of the consulted literature has been predominantly restricted to the behavior alone, neglecting the subsequent psychosocial impacts. It is the belief of the researchers that by instituting or modifying programs that incorporate services for youth experiencing the psychosocial impacts of bullying, overall participation in bullying behaviors can be reduced. For example, treating students who have internalized the label of victim (thus being viewed as a weak or an easy target in the eyes of bullies) can prevent re-victimization and interrupt the cycle of violence. Similar arguments can be made for other psychosocial effects, such as anxiety: students displaying anxious behaviors are viewed as different from the norm and subject to victimization. Addressing these psychosocial impacts may also prevent the phenomenon of bully-victims. Assisting victimized students in processing and coping with their experience will likely decrease the probability of those students in turn lashing out at their peers.

The literature has indicated the importance of issues of difference, specifically as it relates to stigmatization and the increased rate at which students bearing stigma (i.e. disability and/or other markers of difference, label of victim, group membership outside the norm, social disadvantage) are victimized by their peers. However, in the authors’ analysis, social stigmatization was found to be the least discussed of the psychosocial
issues of inquiry, indicating a significant gap in research. Moreover, suicidal ideation was found to be the most frequently discussed psychosocial issue in the literature, exemplifying the high rate at which victimized youth report thinking about suicide, and the severity of the consequences of neglecting to create and implement holistic and effective intervention and prevention models.

Finally, current and traditional school anti-bullying programs have neglected to address the relatively recent, pervasive, and damaging modality of cyberbullying. The overwhelming amount of youth with ease of access and frequent utilization of social media, cell phones, and other technology, in combination with the extremely high reported rates of victimization through these mediums presents a serious problem for anti-bullying efforts. School responsibility and accountability is limited to times at which students are present on campus and involved in school activates. It is therefore of utmost importance to incorporate parental and family oriented interventions into anti-bullying efforts. Addressing bullying from a cultural perspective is also crucial, as this is intervention is not limited to the contextual location of victimization, but permeates the entire experience of youth and their relationships with their peers.

It is because of these inadequacies in current and traditional anti-bullying programs, coupled with the continued prevalence of bullying victimization and its subsequent and detrimental psychosocial impacts, that the researchers suggest the need for a comprehensive, holistic and strengths based approach in effectively addressing this epidemic of violence. It is the researchers belief the incorporation of a culturally oriented
model, focusing on protective and resiliency factors, family involvement, and adequate access to mental health services, into current anti-bullying programs will provide a step in the right direction towards successfully addressing the behavior. Social workers can and should be involved in instigating, promoting, and utilizing such a model at all levels of practice.
APPENDIX A:
CONSULTED LITERATURE: LISTED BY DISCIPLINE

Medical


**Education**


**Psychology**


**Behavior and Social Issues**


**Children**


**Reviews**


**Legal/Policy**


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