

## **Teachers Beliefs and Predictors of Response to Verbal, Physical and Relational Bullying Behavior in Preschool Classrooms**

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### **Abstract**

Relatively few research studies exist on bullying in preschool classrooms despite research indicating bullying roles can be formed at the preschool level. The purpose of this study was to examine preschoolers' teachers' beliefs about the existence of bullying in classrooms, and the factors likely to predict teachers' response towards bullying behavior. Results revealed that teachers' empathy, perception of seriousness, and response significantly predicted preschoolers' verbal, physical, and relational bullying behaviors. The findings of the study highlight the need for advocacy and interventions in preschool classrooms.

**Keywords:** preschool, bullying behavior, empathy, perception of seriousness, responses

## Introduction

Extant literature is clear that healthy behavioral and emotional developmental processes are important precursors to a child's success (Davis, 2015). These may be interfered with among small children in the preschool. When asked about the prevalence of bullying in preschool settings, preschool teachers affirmed that bullying exists (Curtner-Smith et al, 2006; Davis, 2015). For example, Llaberia et al. (2008) surveyed teachers in a Spanish population of 1,104 preschool students from rural and urban settings to investigate links between externalizing diagnoses and aggression in community-based populations. The authors noted that initial findings confirmed the existence of preschool aggression as well as gender and age differences related to aggression. Llaberia et al. also reported physical and verbal aggressive behavior was associated with externalizing disorders. Further insight was offered by Goryl et al. (2013). They noted similar findings when they sought to understand teacher perceptions about bullying and found teachers endorsed beliefs that preschool children were capable of bullying.

## Bullying

Bullying within a school context is often intended to cause fear, harm, or distress to the recipient (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). Typical bullying behaviors include verbal taunts, malicious smear campaigns, threats, harassments and exclusionary behaviors (Camodeca, Caravita, & Copolla, 2015). Within the school environment, children tend to engage in verbal bullying because it is subtle and helps them avoid the consequences associated with physical bullying. Whether bullying is verbal, physical or relational, bullying can have deleterious effects on the psychological and emotional development of children. Jansen et al. (2012) noted that "it is therefore important that children with an increased risk of becoming bullies or victims are identified at a young age so as to facilitate timely prevention of bullying and victimization. Identification is enhanced by knowledge of the determinants and predictors of bullying behavior" (p. 2). Although quite a number of studies have been done on bullying behaviors among adolescents and young adults, relatively few studies have been conducted on bullying behavior among preschoolers.

Teachers play a significant role in the lives of children during the school day. They employ various methods to manage disruptions in the classroom environment while also ensuring that students meet daily responsibilities. When disruptions or issues with student safety arise, teachers must stand ready to intervene by employing various supportive and proactive classroom management skills. A teacher's response to handling classroom disruptions such as bullying can be affected by various factors, and a lack of response or ineffective response style can lead to negative effects on classroom climate (Davis, 2015). Moreover, because teachers have many responsibilities during the school day, they are not always aware of bullying. Since teachers are charged with protecting all students, when bullying situations arise teachers must address them and protect informants from retaliation (Rigby, 2002). However, research has shown that factors such as lack of teacher awareness, perceptions about the seriousness of an incident, and teacher perceptions about their abilities to intervene effectively serve as factors that impact teacher intervention.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model for this study is based on the ecological model, which posits that the quality of interactions within a child's proximal environment is most influential to the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This model also holds the view that classrooms serve as microsystems. That is, the teacher and the classroom environment have reciprocal influences and impact one another. Within the context of bullying, classroom climate may promulgate

social rewards that maintain bullying (Davis, 2015). To support this assertion, researchers have found that classroom behavior affected bullying attitudes of teachers and students. Implications are that individual teacher characteristics may exert an influence on teacher responses into incidents of bullying (Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). Being able to deal with bullying and feeling equipped to handle not only bullying but classroom disruptions, are paramount. There are implications associated with a lack of response to bullying from teachers. That is, because children utilize different coping strategies, it is important that when they seek help from a teacher or another adult, the child must feel that their report to the teacher will not make the situation worse or lead to ineffective response strategies by the teacher and lead to retaliatory attacks on the victim (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

### **Early Childhood/Preschool Education Programs**

Preschool education programs serve as vehicles to improve school readiness (Burger, 2010; Davis, 2015). Federal programs such as the Head Start program recognize the influences of environment and culture on the areas of cognitive and social emotional development (Head Start Act, 2008). Additionally, stakeholders such as legislators, educators, and parents have begun to recognize the benefits of early intervention as evidenced by federal mandates. In fact, schools classified as Title I are mandated to offer pre-Kindergarten classes with class limitations set to 18 students per classroom (NCLB, 2001). The efficacy of early intervention programs, types of community based and non-community-based programs, characteristics of high-quality learning environments as well as a review of proactive efforts to standardize the quality of early childhood programs using Quality Ratings, are efforts designed to undergird preschool education.

A child's formative years are very important as environmental influences can have a significant effect that can impact brain development, learning, behavior, physical and mental health (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Thus, investing in the development and enhancement of quality learning programs is paramount. High Quality Learning environments refer to the quality of the school and learning environment and are seen as programs that focus on key components such as teacher effectiveness and safety. The legislative mandates associated with NCLB (2001) requiring increased accountability and budgetary restrictions, implies that policy makers responsible for earmarking funds for early childhood will be forced to make choices about the types of school readiness programs to fund. In light of this, empirical investigations of program quality, teacher effectiveness and student performance variables are necessary (Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007; Winsler et al., 2008).

Two major preschool models exist. The first major preschool model is community-based program, which is a type of school readiness program with limited enrollment and income restrictions. A program that is located in a community-based setting may be funded by the federal government, with a requirement to have a minimum number of students with disabilities enrolled in the program (e.g., Head Start program). The second major preschool model is a Public school/non-community-based program, which is a type of school readiness program that is situated within a public school. Such programs are not based on income and enroll all 3- and 4-year-old children. Further, public school/ non-community-based programs do not include a set of criteria or requirements to enroll students with disabilities. State sponsored programs are referred to as Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs and these often operate within the public-school systems. These programs serve 4-year-old children from all backgrounds regardless of income. The programs are primarily funded by states and have been associated with positive gains in language, math, literacy, and social skills (Magnuson et al., 2007). The structure of

these programs is similar to Headstart with regard to classroom size, and teacher-student ratios (Winsler et al., 2008).

### **Teacher Characteristics**

Most studies examine teacher self-efficacy in handling classroom behavior difficulties and working with students with developmental disabilities as compounding factors (Quesenberry, Hemmeter, & Ostrosky, 2010) that precipitate reasons for expulsions in preschools. Supporting this notion, data from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education indicated that only 20% of preschool teachers received specific training on facilitating children's social and emotional growth in the past year. Other studies have found that early childhood teachers report that coping with challenging behavior is their most pressing training need (Fox & Smith, 2007). This implies limited continuing education in the area of child development may lead to difficulties in teachers being able to differentiate between behaviors that are inappropriate from those that are developmentally age appropriate. Similarly, Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox (2006) delved into the challenging behaviors in early childhood, finding that very often young kindergarten children with challenging behavior problems were less likely to receive teacher feedback and more likely to have performance deficits in kindergarten.

Numerous studies point to the pivotal role teacher's play in handling incidents of bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Crothers & Kolbert, 2008; Davis, 2015; Gordon-Troop & Ladd, 2010; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). However, research studies have concluded that teachers are sometimes unaware or unable to identify bullying, particularly in verbal and relational forms (Farrell, 2010; Goryl et al., 2013). Within preschool settings, research suggests teachers were less likely to classify behaviors as bullying, instead choosing to label behaviors as challenging or inappropriate (2013). Similarly, teachers in preschool settings were less likely to provide feedback about behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

Research has also pointed to teacher characteristics such as teacher empathy toward the victim, perceived self-efficacy, moral orientation (Ellis & Shute, 2007), perceived seriousness (Yoon & Kerber, 2003), and views about peer victimization as factors that affect teacher response to bullying at school (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Yoon, 2004). Other research has suggested student characteristics may impact teacher response style within the classroom. Specifically, Dee (2005) found that factors such as race, gender, IQ, and parental status within the community impact teachers' response level. That is, teachers tended to treat those that were dissimilar in race and gender differently than those who share their race and gender in classrooms (Hekner & Swenson, 2011).

**Teacher Empathy.** Empathy is classified as a character trait that involves cognitive components such as perspective taking or the ability to adapt the view of others or the tendency to respond and experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others undergoing a negative experience (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Researchers have noted a positive relationship between teacher empathy and bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Byers, Caltabiano, & Caltabiano, 2011; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). Teacher empathy is an important construct because teachers must be approachable and able to view situations from the perspective of others. Since children in preschool settings cope with aggression and bullying related instances by telling their teacher or an adult, teachers who lack empathy may not listen or may miss opportunities to intervene when students are trying to make disclosures to them about bullying and other incidents (Hunter & Borg, 2006; Kahn, Jones, & Wieland, 2012).

In relation to empathetic responses, Yoon and Kerber (2003) conducted a research study assessing the factors that influence teacher response style with a sample of 98 teachers. The outcomes of this study revealed that teacher perceptions guided the decision to intervene in bullying situations. That is, teachers who reported high levels of self-efficacy and empathy for the victim were more likely to perceive the need to intervene in the bullying scenarios. In a study involving teacher attitudes toward bullying, Rigby (2002) found that 98% of teachers were sympathetic to victims of bullying; however only 81% of teachers believed teacher intervention was appropriate. Researchers also noted that school psychologists, teachers and school counselors who witnessed peer victimization responded differently leading to increased empathy for victim and subsequent intervention (Newman & Murray, 2005). Thus, empathy seems to serve as a catalyst when educators decide whether to intervene in bullying situations.

**Perception of Classroom Management.** Perceptions about classroom management refers to the beliefs a teacher holds about his or her skills. According to Grining, Raver, Sardin, Metzger, & Jones (2010), teacher characteristics and teacher psychosocial stressors can affect classroom management. Classroom management is characterized as a collage of activities that refers to the teacher's ability to oversee classroom activities such as learning, social interaction, and student behavior (Brophy, 2010). Given research support indicating a correlation between classroom behaviors and bullying attitudes, it is important for teachers to facilitate an atmosphere that deters victimization and bullying attitudes. Further, research has also suggested that classroom behavior management plays an important role in school readiness in early childhood populations.

Snell, Berlin, Vorhees, Stanton-Chapman, and Haddan (2011) surveyed early childhood teachers, directors, assistants, and Headstart staff to understand classroom behavioral practices. In line with other research studies, children's externalizing behaviors were viewed as more problematic by all respondents. According to Snell et al. (2011) implications exist for additional training when dealing with problem behavior in the classroom.

**Perceptions of Seriousness.** Perceptions of seriousness refer to teacher self-perceptions about an incident. With regard to bullying, the perceptions the teacher holds about whether an incident is serious or not has been found to be correlated with teacher level of involvement in bullying situations (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Yoon, 2004; Yoon & Kerber 2003). For example, Kahn et al. (2012) examined teacher intervention styles and noted that interventions were based on the type of aggression displayed and the overall perceived seriousness of the bullying incident. Gordon-Troop and Ladd (2010) conducted a study finding that teachers who held the belief that victims should be more assertive toward bullies were found to have higher levels of peer-reported overt aggression in their classrooms. They also reported that teachers who supported the notion of separating the bully and not having the victim confront the bully had lower levels of classroom aggression. Conversely, teachers who believed bullying was associated with normative development were less likely to punish aggressors and were more apt to tell victims to stay away from their attackers (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Further, teachers who believed victims should assert themselves supported the notion of telling victims to stand up to the bullies (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). With regard to response style, Gordon-Troop and Ladd (2010) found a correlation between teacher response style and level of aggression in the classroom. That is, teachers who separated those involved in bullying incidents had lower levels of aggression in their classroom. In other words, it has been shown that teacher responses to handling bullying incidents can diminish or amplify bullying behaviors (Swearer, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine preschoolers' teachers' beliefs about the existence of bullying in classrooms, and the factors likely to predict teachers' response towards bullying behavior. The following four research questions were considered:

1. Do teachers in preschool classrooms believe that bullying takes place in preschool programs?
2. Does teachers' empathy, perceived seriousness and likelihood of response predict verbal bullying preschool in preschool programs?
3. Does teacher's empathy, perceived seriousness and likelihood of response predict physical bullying in preschool programs?
4. Does teachers' empathy, perceived seriousness and likelihood of response predict relational bullying in preschool programs?

## Method

### Participants

The target population of the study comprised preschool teachers working in a non-profit agency in the southeastern region of the U.S. The teachers and their responses were chosen as the unit of analysis because extant literature suggests majority of school-based bullying occurs at the classroom level in front of teachers (Olweus, 1993). The time frame for data collection was approximately two weeks.

Participants (teachers) ranged in age from 21 to 66 with a mean age of 40.83. The sample comprised 99.2% ( $n = 132$ ) females and .8% ( $n = 1$ ) male. The sample included 82.7% ( $n = 110$ ) teachers who identified as White, 15.8% ( $n = 21$ ) Black and .8% ( $n = 1$ ) who listed Other. Eighty-one teachers (60.9%) held teacher certification. Of the teachers sampled, 51.6% ( $n = 65$ ) held an associate degree, 41.3% ( $n = 52$ ) held a bachelor's degree, and 7.1% ( $n = 9$ ) held a master's degree.

### Setting

The nonprofit agency where the study was conducted served students from low-income areas, military families, and children with disabilities within a 13-county, mostly rural region in the state. Across the preschool centers, most of them were located in areas which listed median annual household incomes ranging from \$34,907 to \$42,253 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). With regard to households below the poverty level, statistics ranged from 16% - 26% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

### Instruments

A web-based survey design was employed to collect data for several reasons: (1) web-based surveys allow for rapid deployment of surveys for respondents who are geographically disbursed; (2) web-based surveys provide convenience, anonymity, and confidentiality, thereby increasing the probability of a higher response rate (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007); and (3) web-based surveys also allow for real-time access to data while allowing for a low-cost method to collect data. Moreover, survey methodology is considered an efficacious method of gathering data in the social sciences because it allows participants to report background information and archival information at one time (Creswell, 2009). The survey contained the following instruments.

**Bullying Attitudes Questionnaire.** The BAQ-M Revised questionnaire, which is a 54-item instrument was adapted for use in this study. The reliability analyses of the BAQ-M Revised

were sufficiently reliable with an overall score of  $\alpha = .92$ . The coefficient alpha for the three subscales of Seriousness, Empathy, and Likelihood of Response were .84, .85, and .88, respectively, and therefore viewed as sufficiently reliable. Relative to validity, it was found all items contained on the BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015) were designed to measure the three types of bullying as recognized in the field, which aided with validity. Since modified steps were taken to address the content validity of the revised instrument, a measurement and statistical expert reviewed all modifications to the instrument and made recommendations prior to administration. Additionally, the reviewers examined the instrument to determine whether the items adequately sampled the domain of interest and the results were used to provide feedback on the instrument's clarity, wording, and other potential areas of concern. Thus, these steps assisted with establishing content validity and usability of the revised instrument (Crocker & Algina, 1986).

The modified version of the Bullying Attitudes Questionnaire, referred to as the BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015), employed the original six written vignettes from the BAQ-M (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Each vignette assessed (1) teacher's perceived seriousness of bullying; (2) empathy toward the victim and (3) teacher's likelihood of intervention using two hypothetical scenarios of verbal, physical, and relational bullying. The vignettes were counterbalanced in order to avoid presentation bias and included scenarios that were directly witnessed by the teacher. The modified instrument was designed to improve content validity and involved adding two additional questions after each vignette to further assess the constructs of perceived seriousness, empathy, and likelihood of intervention.

**Perceived Seriousness Scale.** The BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015) measured perceived seriousness by asking teachers to respond to three items after viewing each of the six written vignettes. Teachers responded to the question, "How serious is this conflict?" by responding to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all Serious) to 5 (Very Serious). The next question asked, "Is this conflict a normative part of the teasing process?" after which the teachers responded to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Finally, the teachers responded to the prompt, "This conflict should be addressed with the student at the end of the day". The teachers then responded using a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In this study, the coefficient alpha for the 18 items of the seriousness subscale was .84.

**Empathy Scale.** The BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015) measured empathy by asking teachers to respond to three items after viewing six written vignettes. After viewing, teachers responded to the first statement, "I would be upset by the student's remarks and feel sympathetic toward the victim", according to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Next, teachers responded to the second statement, "I would feel the need to help the victim" from the Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To the final prompt, "I cannot imagine what it feels like for the victim," teachers again responded to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In this study, the 18-item Empathy sub-scale yielded a coefficient alpha of .85.

**Likelihood of Intervention/Response Scale.** The BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015) measured Likelihood of Intervention by asking teachers to respond to three questions after viewing six written vignettes. With the first question, "How likely are you to intervene in this situation?" teachers responded to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Not at All Likely) to 5 (Very Likely). After responding to the second statement, "I would not classify this scenario as

bullying,” teachers responded to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The final statement, “This conflict does not require teacher intervention,” required teachers to respond to a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In this study, the 18-item Likelihood of Response subscale yielded a coefficient of alpha of .88.

**BAQ-M Verbal Bullying Vignettes.** There were two verbal bullying vignettes on the instrument. Each vignette depicted the same type of bullying and included 9 questions after each vignette. The Cronbach’s alpha for Verbal Vignette #1 was  $\alpha = .65$  ( $n = 9$ ). The Cronbach’s alpha for Verbal Vignette #2 was  $\alpha = .56$  ( $n = 9$ ).

**Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES).** The Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale – short form (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy; 2001) measures domain-specific efficacy. The scale comprises three subscales: student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) asserted the TSES is more highly correlated with the construct of personal teaching efficacy ( $r = .64$ ) than general teaching efficacy ( $r = .16$ ). The measure has two versions, with the long form consisting of 24 questions and a short form consisting of 12 questions. Reliability for the TSES short form was reported as .90 according to the authors of the instrument (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Internal consistency for the sub-scale for engagement was reported as .81 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Internal consistency for the sub-scales for instruction and classroom management were reported as .86 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

In the present study, the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) short form was used. Internal consistency of the instrument was .94. Internal consistency of the sub-scales was reported as .82 for Instructional Practices, .86 for Student Engagement, and .81 for the Classroom Management sub-scale. These scores were consistent with previous studies that have utilized this instrument. Since the goal of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions about their classroom management skills and preschool bullying, only the Classroom Management (CM) sub-scale was used.

## Procedure

All required documents were submitted to the University of Alabama’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to secure approval for the study. The researcher received IRB approval on July 22, 2014 at the University of Alabama. Following approval for the study, the survey items on the BAQ-M Revised (Davis et al., 2015) were entered into Qualtrics Survey Software, an online survey software format for collecting survey data. Next, a meeting was held with the director of the non-profit agency to obtain written consent for the study. Once the survey was activated, a unique Uniform Resource Locator (URL) address was generated for the study. The URL to access the study was embedded in an email along with a cover letter to individuals who voluntarily consented to participate in the study. Upon accessing the link, the teachers viewed a welcome letter reviewing the purpose and indicating their consent for participation. The measures were presented in the following order: Demographics survey, Bullying Attitudes Questionnaire-Modified Revised (Davis et al., 2015) and the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). All measures used in the study took approximately 20 minutes to complete.



## Analyses

Descriptive analyses and Multiple Regression procedures were performed to answer the research questions. Prior to analyzing the research questions, the three basic parametric assumptions of Regression were assessed: (1) Linearity; (2) Independence of the observations; and (3) Homoscedasticity. The assumption of linearity was met after conducting a visual inspection of the scatterplot. To test the assumption of independence, a visual inspection of the scatterplot was conducted. The assumption of homoscedasticity was met by conducting a visual inspection of the residuals plot. The assumption of multi-collinearity was met as correlations between criterion and predictor variables were not too low – none were over .80. Tolerance was calculated using the formula  $T = 1 - R^2$ . Variance inflation factor (VIF) is the inverse of Tolerance ( $1 \div T$ ). Commonly used cutoff points for determining the presence of multi-collinearity are  $T > .10$  and  $VIF < 10$ . There were no correlational results violating this assumption; therefore, the presence of multi-collinearity was not assumed (Gall et al., 2007). The data were reviewed for outliers and there were none present. In the first model, the predictors were Seriousness, Empathy, Response, and the TSES (Classroom Management) sub-scale. The criterion variable was Verbal Bullying. The four predictors were entered simultaneously. In the second and third models, the predictors remained the same, but the criterion variables were changed to physical bullying and relational bullying consecutively.

## Results

Table 1 provides a summary of statistics for respondents' beliefs about bullying in preschool settings. The data indicate 93.2% ( $n = 124$ ) endorsed beliefs that bullying occurs in preschool, while 6.8% ( $n = 9$ ) did not endorse such beliefs. With regard to anti-bullying training, 69.7% ( $n = 92$ ) of the sample indicated they had not received professional development training nor had attended any anti-bullying training, while 30.3% ( $n = 40$ ) indicated they had participated in formal teacher training or professional development on anti-bullying.

Variable	Frequency <i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Endorse belief that bullying exists in Preschool	124	93.2 %
Did not endorse belief that bullying exists in Preschool	9	6.8%
Total	132	100 %

Table 1: Belief in Bullying in Preschool Settings

Table 2 provides the results of the multiple regression analysis for research question two. The results of the regression analyses were significant, indicating the model was significant. The model explained 70.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = 70.5\%$ ;  $F(4,122) = 76.15$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Three of the predictors, Empathy ( $\beta = .021$ ,  $p = 000$ ), Seriousness ( $\beta = .016$ ,  $p = 000$ ), Response ( $\beta = .009$ ,  $p = .017$ ), significantly predicted verbal bullying. However, an inspection of the beta weights revealed that the TES-Classroom management ( $\beta = .005$ ,  $p = .138$ ) was not a significant predictor in the model.

Variable	$\beta$	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Empathy	.021	.000 *
Seriousness	.016	.000 *
Response	.009	.017 *
TES-CM	.005	.138

Note  $R^2 = 70.1\%$  \* $p < .05$ .

Table 2: Multiple Regression: Seriousness, Empathy, Response, TSES, and Verbal Bullying

The result of the regression analysis using Seriousness, Empathy, Response, and the TSES Classroom Management sub-scale as predictors and Physical Bullying as the criterion variable is shown in Table 3. The results of the regression analysis were significant indicating the model was significant. The model explained 84.1% of the variance ( $R^2 = 84.1\%$ ;  $F(4,122) = 167.75$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Three of the predictors, Empathy ( $\beta = .019$ ,  $p = .000$ ), Seriousness ( $\beta = .022$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and Response ( $\beta = .019$ ,  $p = .000$ ), significantly predicted physical bullying. However, an inspection of the beta weights revealed that the TSES-Classroom management ( $\beta = .000$ ,  $p = .923$ ) was not a significant predictor in the model.

Variable	$\beta$	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Empathy	.019	.000 *
Seriousness	.022	.000 *
Response	.019	.000 *
TES-CM	.000	.923

Note  $R^2 = 84.1\%$  \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3: Multiple Regression: Seriousness, Empathy, Response, TSES, and Physical Bullying

Table 4 provides the results of the multiple regression analysis for Table 4. Similar to the previous analyses, the result of the analysis was significant, indicating the model was significant. The model explained 73.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = 73.9\%$ ;  $F(4,122) = 90.03$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Three of the predictors, Empathy ( $\beta = .015$ ,  $p = .000$ ), Seriousness ( $\beta = .012$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and Response ( $\beta = .029$ ,  $p = .000$ ), significantly predicted Relational Bullying. However, an inspection of the beta weights revealed that the TSES-classroom management ( $\beta = -.004$ ,  $p = .275$ ) was not a significant predictor in the model.

Variable	$\beta$	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Empathy	.015	.000 *
Seriousness	.012	.000 *
Response	.029	.000 *
TES-CM	.000	.275

Note  $R^2 = 73.9\%$  \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Table 4. Multiple Regression: Seriousness, Empathy, Response, TSES, and Relational Bullying

## Discussion

A review of mean scores for the Seriousness construct suggests that teachers perceive physical bullying as more serious. Also, Empathy scores, though closely related across all bullying types (i.e., verbal, physical, and relational), were noted to be higher when the type of bullying was physical and lower on relational bullying. Finally, when looking at the perception of teachers on the Response construct, response scores were higher on vignettes depicting verbal bullying. Results from the regression model containing the constructs of Seriousness, Empathy, Response, and Classroom Management were significant. However, only three predictors (i.e., Seriousness, Empathy, and Response) were significant, while the TSES-CM was not. An inspection of the beta weights indicated the relationship between each independent variable and dependent variable appears to present as a stronger predictor in verbal bullying than seriousness and response when compared across variables in the study. To add, an inspection of the beta weights on the seriousness scores appears to be a stronger predictor in vignettes depicting physical bullying than empathy and response when compared across variables in the study. The beta weights for response indicated that response appears to be a stronger predictor in vignettes depicting relational bullying when compared across the variables in the study.

The results of the study indicate that teachers had some knowledge about each bullying type and expressed awareness of the need to be responsive to bullying, as depicted in the scenarios. This was an encouraging finding since children can be hesitant to report bullying for fear of reprisal. Responsiveness is important because teachers serve as valuable conduits for amplifying or diminishing the extent of bullying or aggression-related instances and the reporting of such behaviors. Of importance, while teachers indicated an awareness and desire to respond to bullying in this study, they reported having little training or professional development about anti-bullying efforts, which could indicate insufficient or ineffective intervention training. This is a concern since the intervention literature has been clear that intervention alone is not enough. Rather, focused intervention is integral to designing effective prevention and intervention efforts.

With the construct of seriousness, the teachers in this study were found to be more likely to respond to Verbal Bullying followed by Physical Bullying and finally Relational Bullying. The overall results involving teacher perceptions about the seriousness of bullying align with the literature which supports that teachers are likely to perceive instances involving physical bullying as serious and are likely to intervene (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2007; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Contrary to the bullying literature, which has indicated that teachers were more likely to consider their responses to Physical Bullying as more serious, the results indicate teachers from preschool settings in this study were more likely to respond to instances of Verbal Bullying as depicted in the vignettes.

## Implications for School Counselors and Administrators

The study has implications for professionals, teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and other allied health professionals. Specifically, the literature is clear that early intervention efforts are paramount, and that bullying is unlikely to stop without focused prevention and intervention efforts. Implications exist for school psychologists as they are trained in mental health assessment and multi-tiered proactive service models. This specialized training places school psychologists in a unique position to assume a leadership role in facilitating prevention and intervention efforts in community-based and non-community-based school settings. School psychologists serve parents and students from birth to five years, providing pediatric

assessments, developmental screenings, and mental health counseling services within school districts with children who may or may not be enrolled in school.

Due to increased accountability in educational settings coupled with early intervention literature, this study highlights the need for more comprehensive services for preschool age groups. Specifically, implications exist for school psychologists and school counselors to work conjointly to design prevention and intervention campaigns. Since school counselors spend a great deal of time on personal and social skills enhancement in the classroom (i.e., group guidance lessons), they are in a position to recognize and assist with primary intervention and training responses in the K-12 school settings. However, preschools located in community-based settings appear to be at a disadvantage because they often do not have access to school counselors. Likewise, many school districts employ a limited number of school psychologists who serve a vast number of schools, thereby limiting opportunities to consult with other professionals. Thus, an important finding from this study is the identification of this intervening gap that must be noted and filled by school psychologists and other professionals that currently work with preschool populations. This lack of proximity to helping professionals in the community-based settings also underlines the importance of thorough training of the preschool classroom teachers and parents.

Since school psychologists serve as change agents and work to quell more insidious forms of bullying included in this study, as well other forms (e.g., cyber-bullying), they are in line to team with school counselors and other helping professionals to offer parent training and the enhancement of family/school collaboration efforts. For example, there are opportunities to help parents discourage bullying behaviors while at the same time model positive behavior. Thus, school districts may need to focus on additional counseling and psychological services for preschool age children and their families to ensure continuity of care. Advocating for more services and for more professionals to work with children in pre-K settings in community-based settings is strongly encouraged

Since most teachers in the study indicated they had limited or no professional development on bullying, the results of this study could serve as a baseline to evaluate curriculum/training if the teachers in the study are evaluated after professional development. A follow-up to this study might include teacher training on bullying specific to preschool populations.

Also, while students were not included in the study, exploring student perceptions, patterns of similarity, and differences between student and teachers would be informative and could guide future training. To add, while the literature points to increases in the numbers of children being expelled (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shakur, 2006; Kaiser & Sklar-Raminisky, 2012), only two teachers from the sample indicated they had recommended a child be expelled over the past 12 months. This lower-than-expected finding could have been related to the fact that data collection occurred from July to August, prior to the start of the school year. Future research may be more efficacious by collecting data after school starts as teachers may have an opportunity to work at a particular school to understand policies. For example, many teachers in the study indicated they were not aware if their centers/schools had policies on suspension/expulsion or if anti-bullying policies existed. Research has suggested self-efficacy and classroom management skills are more efficacious when policies and expectations are clearly communicated (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). This study points to the need for increased teacher awareness of bullying and training in anti-bullying efforts. With proper teacher training, students should become more inclined to report bullying if teachers are knowledgeable, respond with respect and empathy, and have classroom norms that assist

bystanders and victims. Designing teacher education programs that target the development and nurturance of teacher dispositions (e.g., respect, empathy) is valuable (Byers, et al., 2011; Coldarci, 1992; Coyle, 2008; Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

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