

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS BULLYING AND PERCEPTION TOWARDS HANDLING BULLYING AMONG STAKEHOLDERS AT THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHONBURI, THAILAND

Laxmi Dangmaneerat<sup>1</sup>

Suwattana Eamoraphan<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This study was conducted to compare the attitudes towards bullying and perception towards handling bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand. There were 4 objectives of this study (1) to identify the attitudes towards bullying; (2) to identify perception towards handling bullying; (3) to determine the significant difference of attitudes towards bullying; and (4) to determine the significant difference of perception towards handling bullying; among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand. Three groups of stakeholders in the study were school personnel, parents and students. Attitudes were determined by three factors (1) perceived seriousness (2) is this bullying? And (3) empathy towards victim. Perception towards handling bullying was determined by 5 different strategies used to handle a bullying situation. The population for this study were 22 school personnel, 37 students and 37 parents. Two questionnaires used were the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified (BAQ-M) and the Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ). School parent and students indicated very high to the three aspects of attitudes towards bullying; whereas, parents indicated high. All three groups reported that they were likely to handle a bullying situation. The study indicated that there was a significant difference at .05 in the attitudes towards bullying among stakeholders. A Post-Hoc analysis was done to identify the group that was different. The difference in attitude came from the parent group which was different from the other two groups. The study indicated that there was no significant difference at .05 in the perception towards handling bullying.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Stakeholders, Attitude, Perception, International School of Chonburi

## Introduction

A comparative study of the attitudes towards bullying and perception towards handling bullying among stakeholders can lead to an understanding of what can be done collectively to tackle this lingering problem that seems to increase when ignored. In order for any school to select an intervention or prevention program, the school needs to have a clear picture on what are the attitudes and perception with regards to the three main groups that contribute to a school community. Stakeholders include school personnel, students and parents. School personnel spend a lot of time with children and if there needs to be an intervention or awareness program, school personnel needs to be trained and involved in the process. If there is no understanding of how they respond or even empathize with the situation, there is no way any strategy would work. Without an understanding of what school personnel or students perceive to be bullying and how they rate the severity of it, schools may be missing the mark and preaching things that are not necessary at all. If bullying starts with children, then it only makes sense that we get into the minds of our students and take a look at the situation from their point of view. Children may not be equipped to handle the situation on their own, but school personnel and parents can provide that support.

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<sup>1</sup> M.Ed. Candidate, Master of Education in Educational Administration, Assumption University, Thailand.

[laxmipawa@yahoo.com](mailto:laxmipawa@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Associate Professor, Dean, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Thailand.

[drsuwattana@yahoo.edu](mailto:drsuwattana@yahoo.edu)

## Research Objectives

*There are four objectives:*

1. To identify the attitudes towards bullying of stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand.
2. To identify the perception towards handling bullying of stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand.
3. To determine if there is a significant difference of attitudes towards bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand.
4. To determine if there is a significant difference of perception towards handling bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand.

## Literature Review

### *Social-Ecological Systems Theory*

Previous studies by Yoon and Kerber used the Social Ecological Systems Theory as a basis for their research which used the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified as the main instrument for the study. Bullying cannot be explained in isolation without referring to the environmental influences which stem from the home, social system like schools and the peer. They are inter-related and the way the bullying manifests itself is through the acceptance and modeled behavior within the inter-related systems. The Social Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) places the individual or in the case of this study, the student at the center of the model. According to the model, each level is nested within the other levels.

This theory suggests that the levels of interaction among each relationship influences the attitude of the individual. The social-ecological system helps clarify why students act a certain way. What school personnel or parents perceive to be bullying behavior, directly influences the attitude of the primary student in that environment.

The teacher-student and parent-student interactions is what creates the child's attitude of the behavior and indicates whether the situation is bullying, its perceived seriousness and their empathy towards the victims. This interaction creates a social environment in which students learn how to develop their behaviour, manifests itself a part of the process of learning and the way they interact with other children. It is significant to the behaviour of the child when they see how their teacher and parents respond to situations and climate of the school and home.

### *Theory of Coping*

The theory of coping by Hunter and Boyle (2004) could be conceptualized that witnessing an uncomfortable situation such as a bullying incident for any of the members from the three groups of this study could trigger a sense of stress. Lazarus (1999) defined coping as a way that individuals manage life conditions that bring about stress.

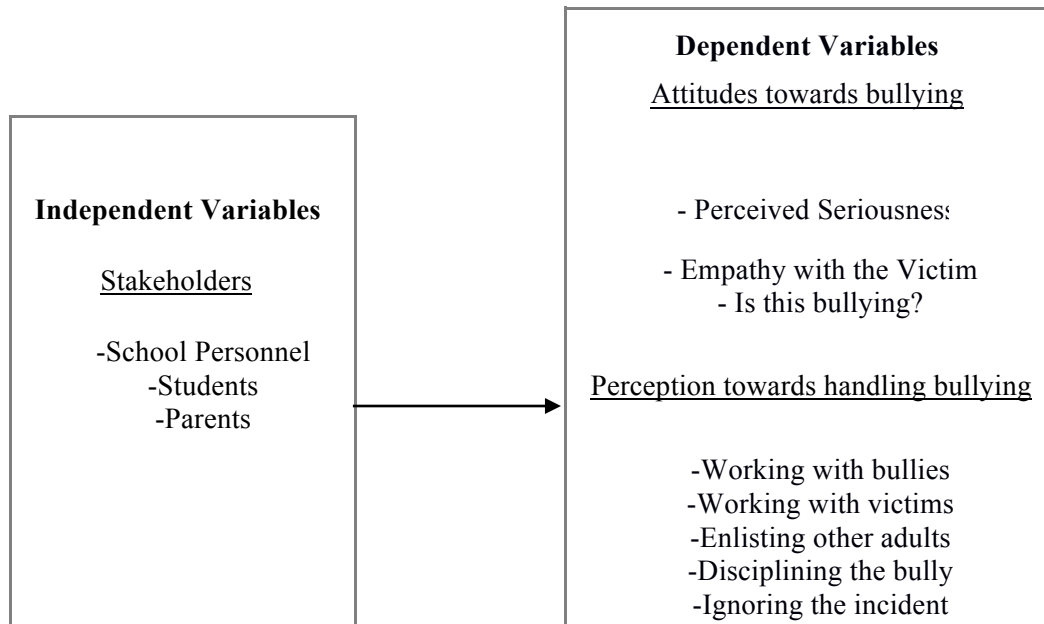
In order to form a response to that stressful situation, the theory suggests that two factors, the individual and situational factor affect the appraisal process. In this study, perception towards handling bullying refers to the response of the stressful situation, bullying. The appraisal process takes place by which one evaluates the situation that they are in and then selects the best action to resolve or respond to.

The theory goes on to elaborate on the appraisal process as consisting of the primary and secondary aspect to it. The primary appraisal as in this study will give importance of a label to the event. In this case pertaining to the study the primary appraisal will ask "Is this bullying?" "Is this serious?". The secondary appraisal will be in terms of the evaluation of the responses that are available. According to the Handling Bullying Questionnaire the five responses to handling bullying include 1) working with the bully 2) working with the victim 3) enlisting other adults 4) disciplining the bully and 5) ignoring the incident.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below is based on the theoretical framework which stems from the social-ecological perspective in terms of attitudes and the theory of coping which gives an understanding to perceptions towards handling bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi.

The attitudes focused on perceived seriousness of the situation, empathy with the victim, and whether they identify the scenario as a bullying incident. The second aspect of the research identified perception that stakeholders have towards handling bullying. The responses include working with bullies, working with victims, enlisting other adults, disciplining the bully, and ignoring the incident.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

## Procedures

### *Participants*

The population in this study were stakeholders which included all school personnel, students and parents of children between the ages of 5-11 years old at the International School of Chonburi from the academic year 2016-2017. This population included 22 school personnel, 37 students and 37 parents that were asked to take part in the survey from the International School of Chonburi. Parents could be either the mother or father of the child.

All school personnel and parents at the International School of Chonburi were able to read and communicate in English. The primary students were able to communicate and understand English. The total number of population for the study was 96.

### *Instrumentation*

This study used two research instruments, the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified (BAQ-M) and the Handling Bullying Questionnaire. The Bullying Attitude Questionnaire (BAQ) was originally designed by Craig, Henderson and Murphy (2000) to assess teacher attitudes and used eighteen vignettes. However, for this study, the researcher will be using The Bullying Attitudes Questionnaire-Modified (BAQ-M) which was modified by Yoon and Kerber (2003) in order to assess attitudes towards bullying among stakeholders.

There have been some changes made to the original vignettes to make the bullying scenarios less vague and more clear (Yoon, 2004) using only witnessed bullying situations (Boulton et al., 2014). The modified questionnaire assessed 3 aspects of attitudes towards bullying. The aspects were classified as (1) perceived seriousness of bullying, (2) whether or not they identify the situation as bullying, and (3) empathy toward victims.

Each aspect of the attitudes towards bullying measured 3 forms of bullying. Respondents were presented with six vignettes. Six vignettes included two physical bullying, two verbal bullying and two social exclusion bullying scenarios. Physical bullying is when the bully hurts a person physically or

causes harm to their belongings. This included any form of physical violence, spitting, tripping, taking their belongings or using inappropriate hand gestures.

Verbal bullying included teasing, making in-appropriate comments, jeering or taunting and threatening them verbally. Social exclusion refers to when the bully seeks to hurt someone's reputation or relationships that they may have. This included exclusion, spreading rumors or plain public humiliation. Each vignette depicted bullying as a pattern of behavior, not as an isolated event. Following the vignettes were three questions:

- 1) How serious is the conflict?
- 2) Would you call this bullying? *And*
- 3) Do you empathize with the victim?

For questions number (1) Perceived seriousness and (3) Empathy, the study used a 5 point Likert scale as a scale for measuring the attitudes towards bullying among stakeholders which are school personnel, students and parents at the International School of Chonburi. Question (2) the response format is dichotomous (items range from 0 – 1). For this question the responses were measured as a percentage determined from the frequency of the response, which is either 'yes' or 'no' from the respondents.

This study also used The Handling Bullying Questionnaire (HBQ) designed by Bauman, Rigby & Hoppa, (2008). The instrument designed for this research included instructions, a scenario of bullying, and a response to the situation.

The Handling Bullying Questionnaire (Bauman et al., 2000) is a 22 item questionnaire in which the participant indicated the likelihood that they would use the strategies when faced with a bullying situation. This section focuses on how stakeholders would respond to a specific situation. The higher score indicated the likelihood towards implementing the strategy presented in the questionnaire towards handling bullying.

### **Collection of Data**

The researcher distributed both the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified and Handling Bullying Questionnaire to school personnel and collected the information within a week. The return rate from school personnel was 100 percent.

The researcher distributed both the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire-Modified and Handling Bullying Questionnaire to the parents via their child's communication folder. Prior to sending out the questionnaires in the children's communication folder, the academic head at the International School of Chonburi sent out an email to 37 parents that would be participating in the study and asking for their support.

This was also followed up by a personal conversation with parents that came to pick their children up from school.

The researcher worked at the school and therefore was able to personally communicate the idea of the research to parents who were interested in understanding more.

The researcher received a 100% of the questionnaires from the parents, which was within the week. Since the study compared the difference between the three groups, it was not significant to the study the gender of the parent. Therefore any parent, being the mother or father was acceptable in the study. The third group in this study were the students.

There were a total of 37 students from Years 1 to Year 6. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the students. As for the students in Years 1 and 2, the researcher administered the questionnaires by pulling them out of their classrooms for about 15 minutes in order to get their answers one-on-one.

The children in Years 3-6 were able to read fluently and the questionnaire was administered as a group, while the researcher was in the room. To assist these children the researcher also did a dramatization of the vignettes for the children using puppets. This made it easier for them to read and connect the scenarios that were presented to them.

## Findings

### Research Objective 1

#### 1.1 Perceived Seriousness

From Table 1, in terms of the attitude of perceived seriousness, school personnel has the highest mean score of 4.42 followed by the student group with a mean score of 4.31 and last is the parent group with a score of 3.95.

All three groups indicated that their attitude towards bullying is high in terms of perceived seriousness, from the six vignettes presented.

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Perceived Seriousness of Stakeholders**

Vignettes	School personnel (n=22)			Students (n=37)			Parents (n=37)		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Verbal	4.27	0.63	High	3.7	0.81	High	3.65	0.86	High
2. Physical	4.91	0.43	Very high	4.49	0.69	High	4.73	0.51	Very high
3. Verbal	4.27	1.03	High	4.27	0.9	High	3.65	1.03	High
4. Physical	4.91	0.29	Very high	4.65	0.68	Very high	4.65	0.59	Very high
5. Social Exclusion	3.77	1.02	High	4.19	1.05	High	3.03	0.99	Moderate
6. Social Exclusion	4.41	0.73	High	4.57	0.73	Very high	4	0.91	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>4.31</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>High</b>

#### 1.2 Is this bullying?

Table 2 demonstrated that, 95.5% of all students considered the vignettes to be bullying and 93.18% of all school personnel considered all scenarios presented in the six vignettes to be bullying.

It is to be noted that where the school personnel and students idea of bullying is very close, there is a clear and difference when it comes to the parent group. Only 78.38% of parents considered the vignettes to constitute as bullying.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage to “Is this bullying?” of Stakeholders

Vignettes	School personnel (n=22)		Students (n=37)		Parents (n=37)	
	No Frequency (Percent)	Yes Frequency (Percent)	No Frequency (Percent)	Yes Frequency (Percent)	No Frequency (Percent)	Yes Frequency (Percent)
<b>1. Verbal</b>	-	22 -100	1 -2.7	36 -97.3	7 -18.92	30 -81.08
<b>2. Physical</b>	-	22 -100	-	37 -100	-	37 -100
<b>3. Verbal</b>	3 -13.64	19 -86.36	4 -10.81	33 -89.19	9 -24.32	28 -75.68
<b>4. Physical</b>	-	22 -100	-	37 -100	1 -2.7	36 -97.3
<b>5. Social Exclusion</b>	4 -18.18	18 -81.82	2 -5.41	35 -94.59	21 -56.76	16 -43.24
<b>6. Social Exclusion</b>	2 -9.09	20 -90.91	3 -8.11	34 -91.89	10 -27.03	27 -72.97
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b> <b>-6.82</b>	<b>123</b> <b>-93.18</b>	<b>10</b> <b>-4.5</b>	<b>212</b> <b>-95.5</b>	<b>48</b> <b>-21.62</b>	<b>174</b> <b>-78.38</b>

### 1.3 Empathy

From Table 3, the overall scores were highest for school personnel at 4.49 followed by students at 4.47. The parent group had an overall mean score of 4.18 in terms of empathy for all.

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Empathy of Stakeholders**

Vignettes	School personnel (n=22)			Students (n=37)			Parents (n=37)		
	Mean	SD	Intrepretation	Mean	SD	Intrepretation	Mean	SD	Intrepretation
1. Verbal	4.41	0.5	High	4.08	0.86	High	4.11	0.61	High
2. Physical	4.77	0.53	Very high	4.65	0.63	Very High	4.65	0.68	Very high
3. Verbal	4.36	0.79	High	4.3	0.88	High	3.84	0.73	High
4. Physical	4.86	0.35	Very high	4.7	0.57	Very high	4.65	0.59	Very high
5. Social Exclusion	4.05	0.79	High	4.43	0.8	High	3.51	0.87	High
6. Social Exclusion	4.5	0.51	High	4.65	0.63	Very high	4.3	0.74	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>4.18</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 4 depicts that the overall attitudes towards bullying is equal for school personnel and students. Both groups have a total mean score in all three aspects at 4.84.

In terms of perceived seriousness, empathy and is this bullying, both groups indicated that they are highly aware of the seriousness, they also empathize with the victims at a high level and indicated that the situations constitute as bullying. The parent group has a total mean score of 4.28 when it comes to their attitude towards bullying.

As the table above indicated they have shown only moderate levels of awareness in terms of how serious bullying can be and not knowing if the situation constitutes as bullying or not. Although parents do show a high level of empathy towards the victims, the other results do not match.

**Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation for Attitude on Bullying of Stakeholders**

	School Personnel (n=22)			Students (n=37)			Parents (n=37)		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Perceived Seriousness	4.42	0.46	High	4.31	0.49	High	3.95	0.57	Moderate
Empathy	4.49	0.4	High	4.47	0.49	High	4.18	0.49	High
Bullying	5.59	0.67	Very High	5.73	0.77	Very High	4.7	1.08	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.84</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>4.84</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>4.28</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>High</b>

*Research Objective Two***Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Components of Perception Towards Handling Bullying of Stakeholders**

Strategies for Handling Bullying	School Personnel			Students			Parents		
	(n=22)			(n=37)			(n=37)		
	Mean	SD	Intpretation	Mean	SD	Intpretation	Mean	SD	Intpretation
Working with the bully	4.37	0.57	Very Likely	3.9	0.75	Likely	4.06	0.6	Likely
Working with the victim	3.53	0.9	Likely	4.14	0.87	Likely	3.53	0.89	Likely
Enlisting other adults	4.14	0.54	Likely	4.32	0.6	Very Likely	4.08	0.69	Likely
Disciplining the bully	4.39	0.57	Very Likely	4.62	0.5	Very Likely	3.97	0.78	Likely
Ignoring the incident	1.74	0.82	Never	1.49	0.61	Never	1.98	1.07	Never
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>Likely</b>

From Table 5 in terms of the perception towards handling bullying it is indicated that students have the highest mean score of 3.69 followed by school personnel with a mean score of 3.63 and last is the parent group with a score of 3.53. All three groups have reported that they would likely do something to handle bullying. To compare the attitude towards bullying among school personnel, students and parents at the International School of Chonburi, the researcher used one-way ANOVA. The research finding is displayed in table 15.

**Table 6: Comparison of attitude towards bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand**

Group	Mean	SD	F	p-value
School Personnel	4.84	0.44	12.58	0.000*
Students	4.84	0.47		
Parents	4.28	0.63		

\*p < .05

The analysis from Table 6 shows a significant difference at the level of .05. The stakeholders have a difference in attitude as stated in the hypothesis. The results showed a significant difference in attitudes towards bullying among stakeholders and in order to be able to identify exactly where the difference stems from, the researcher conducted a Scheffe's Test to know exactly where the difference lies.

**Table 7: Post-Hoc Scheffe's Test on Attitudes towards bullying among Stakeholders**

Group	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2
Parents	37	4.28	
School Personnel	22		4.84
Students	37		4.84
Sig.		1	1

Table 7 indicated that parents' attitudes towards bullying are significantly different from that of school personnel and students at the level of .05.



**Table 8: Comparison of Perception towards handling bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p-value</b>
School Personnel	3.63	0.38	1.77	0.18
Students	3.69	0.31		
Parents	3.51	0.45		

\*p < .05

Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference at .05 in the overall perception towards bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi. The results indicated a p-value of 0.18 which is higher than .05, which means that hypothesis is not accepted.

**Table 9: Comparison of Perception towards handling bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi, Thailand**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p-value</b>
School Personnel	3.63	0.38	1.77	0.18
Students	3.69	0.31		
Parents	3.51	0.45		

\*p < .05

Table 9 shows that there is no significant difference at .05 in the overall perception towards bullying among stakeholders at the International School of Chonburi. The results indicated a p-value of 0.18 which is higher than .05, which means that hypothesis is not accepted.

## Discussion

According to Bauman and Del Rio (2006) in their previous studies, verbal bullying and social exclusion were not considered to be serious matters and not usually acted upon. These results were also reflected in the parent group. Parents paid serious attention to physical bullying and not taken social exclusion bullying seriously, rating it as moderate.

Another interesting aspect of the attitude towards perceived seriousness of bullying scenarios is how much more less serious the form of bullying through social exclusion is thought of by parents. The researcher was quite surprised to find that less than half of the parents did not think of social exclusion as a very high or even high to indicate that it is a serious matter. This is an area that will help the school fill in the gaps when setting up a bullying prevention program.

The grown ups which consists of school personnel and parents empathize with the situations from the vignettes in the exact same order. However, the children, according to the mean scores on empathy gave a clear indication that they empathize most with victims of physical, social exclusion and then finally verbal bullying. The results on empathy sheds a light on what children deem to be important and how they would take care of the victims in bullying situations. This indication is a very important stepping stone and a message to the school that it is necessary to work with the victims just as much as trying to fix the problem with the bully. Sometimes, parents dismiss how actions from social exclusion can be daunting for children facing the situation, which shows in their response on perceived seriousness. It is very important for all parties involved in dealing with children to become aware of such situations because it is very discreet and subtle when compared with an outright physical or verbal form of bullying. The results of this study support previous studies that social exclusion is taken less seriously, and are less likely to intervene when they witness verbal or physical aggression. Without consistent, effective consequences, socially exclusive behaviours will continue to take place. That is, when school personnel or parents ignoring of such behaviours, it is likely that students will understand that such behavior is acceptable, sending an inappropriate message that social exclusion is tolerated and even allowed.

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