

## &lt;原 著&gt;

Bullying (*Ijime*) in Japanese Schools: Teacher-Student Relationships for PreventionKeita YAMADA\*, Yasushi FUJII\*\*, Ariane SCHRATTER\*\*\*,  
and Jun KANNO\*\*

## Abstract

Bullying (*ijime*) among students is one of the biggest problems that need to be dealt with in contemporary Japan. There were eighty-six teacher participants in the present study from four different schools (two elementary schools, a junior high school, and a high school) in Japan. Participants received a survey questionnaire to examine the question “Do teachers perceive more bullying among students if they are willing to build a strong teacher-student relationship?” Surprisingly, the result showed that teachers who spend more time with students to embrace a teacher-student relationship indicated that they are not sure whether bullying does not exist in their classroom or not. Moreover, it was found that teachers who spend more time with their students and have a strong relationship with students could not predict how often they see bullying behavior among students. Most of the teachers expressed serious concern towards bullying in school and a small number of teachers were absolutely confident about dealing with both physical and psychological bullying behaviors.

**Key words:** bullying, school, teacher, prevention

## INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (Monbukagakusho) in Japan defines *ijime* (bullying) as “a situation where a certain student feels psychological distress from receiving both mental and physical aggression from a person or a group, and the incidents can be observed both inside and outside the school

environment” (2006). While bullying is a worldwide social phenomenon that needs to be tackled, public concern toward *ijime* in Japan increased after 16 students had committed suicide due to *ijime* at school from 1984 to 1985 (Morita, 2010).

In Japan, *ijime* is more likely to take place in the classroom compared to other countries where *ijime* is more common in the playground for example (Morita, 2001). Typically in Japan, students spend most of their time with only one teacher who is in charge of the classroom. Thus, the role of teachers and their attitudes toward bullying at school is critical to prevent and reduce

\* Graduate School of Human Sciences,  
Waseda University

\*\* Faculty of Human Sciences, Waseda  
University

\*\*\* Faculty of Psychology, Maryville College

bullying. Yoon (2004) found that the cognitive patterns of teachers, such as empathy, self-efficacy, and perceived seriousness are significant aspects of the teacher-student relationship. According to her study, those three cognitive patterns of teachers are very important to the teachers' intervention in coping with bullying. Significantly, teachers who perceive bullying more seriously, score higher in self-efficacy and demonstrate more empathy were more likely to want to sort out bullying situations. As a result, teachers' knowledge of outcomes and impacts resulting from bullying would change their attention toward it, and cause them to intervene.

In the classroom where teachers show more importance to bullying and create a peaceful learning environment, it may create a healthy environment where students are more willing to tell teachers about becoming victims of bullying (Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy, and Dill, 2008). However, in many cases, children do not talk about their experience to teachers. A Japanese national survey on bullying concluded that 43% of victims did not tell teachers when they were bullied (Morita, 1999). The reason why students are reluctant to tell about *ijime* when they are victimized is because usually they do not trust their teachers, are afraid that the situation might get worse, and stick it out until they can overcome the problem by themselves (Kanetsuna, Smith, & Morita, 2006).

Similarly, *ijime* is more likely to happen where teachers are not willing to listen to their students, and the relationship between teachers and students is poor and lacks trust (Yoneyama, 1999). Yoon and Kerber (2003) investigated teachers' attitudes toward

bullying and their methods to deal with the behavior. They concluded that teachers who were not serious about school bullying were less likely to intervene than those who were. It is a huge problem that teachers are very passive about dealing with bullying and used "lenient intervention strategies (i.e. ignoring)" when it actually happens. Those inappropriate approaches and lack of strategies to cope with bullying result in repeated bullying among students.

Hence, the strong teacher-student relationship is an essential key to prevent and reduce *ijime*. If the teachers could maintain a strong relationship with students by creating a bullying-free atmosphere in the classroom, students may feel more comfortable reporting to teachers the bullying behaviors. Additionally, teachers are more likely to have a responsible attitude to perceive and recognize the act and to intervene.

To examine the hypothesis that a strong teacher-student relationship can prevent school bullying, we conducted a survey on teachers' relationship with students and their attitudes toward bullying. It was hypothesized that teachers who spend more time with students to build a strong teacher-students relationship can predict and perceive more bullying behaviors among students.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

In this study, there were eighty-six teacher participants from four different schools (two elementary schools, a junior high school, and

a high school) in Miyazaki prefecture, Japan. Fourteen teachers failed to complete the backside of the survey, and thus, were removed from the data set and so the total number of teachers used in this study was seventy-two. Most teachers have been teaching for more than fifteen years ( $n=47$ ) while others for less than one year ( $n=3$ ), or between three to four years ( $n=4$ ), between five to ten years ( $n=9$ ), and between eleven to fifteen years ( $n=9$ ). We failed to obtain data of participants' sex and age. The first author chose the participating schools and they represent a relatively varied sample of schools. The sample schools are located in a fairly big city and they represent general types of schools in Japan in terms of size. None of them received compensation.

### *Materials*

Each participant received a survey and responded to the questions using a 5-point Likert scale. The first author compiled the survey questions in order to examine the attitude of teachers toward bullying at school and their relationships with students. Some of the questions requested participants to describe their personal experiences in detail (Appendice). All materials were translated into Japanese.

### *Procedure*

Participants received a survey and consented to participating in the study by completing the survey anonymously. At each school after the completion of the survey, the questionnaires were collected and sent to the first author. Minitab version15 software was used for the statistical analysis in this study.

### *Research ethics*

The study was carefully considered and approved by the Maryville College Institutional Review Board (Protocol#25-09-09-03). All participants were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (American Psychology Association, 2002).

## RESULTS

### *Perception of teacher-student relationships*

The research question was whether teachers could predict and perceive more bullying among students if they spend more time with the students and have a strong relationship with them. To answer this question, teachers were asked two questions to see how often they notice bullying.

The first question was "How often do you see bullying among students?". Five teachers (6.94%) answered "never", forty teachers (55.56%) replied "rarely", while twenty-four teachers (33.33%) responded "sometimes", three teachers (4.17%) answered "often" and no teacher cited "all the time". Teachers were also asked to describe the types of bullying they saw. Some of the examples were: "making fun of a specific individual", and "cut an individual's hair" (Table 1).

The second question was "How confident are you that there is no bullying in your classroom?". Five teachers (6.94%) answered "not at all", thirty-three teachers (45.83%) answered "a little", yet twenty-two teachers (30.56%) responded "somewhat", ten teachers

Table 1  
Specific descriptions of responses

Question	Description	Number of responses
How often do you see bullying among students?	-Making fun of an individual	5
	-Cruel words	4
	-Commenting on web page	2
	-Punching	1
	-Avoiding touching things which an individual touched	1
	-Not playing together	1
	-Cutting an individual's hair	1
	-Being mean	1
How often do you spend time with your students outside of classes?	-Club activities	11
	-Lunch break	11
	-Cleaning time	6
	-Student organization	4
	-Individual conversation	4
	-School events	3
	-After school	3
	-After school classes	2
	-During exam week	1
	-Dancing	1
-Visiting home	1	
How often do you try something (e.g. activities) to know more about your students?	-Individual conversation	6
	-Chatting	5
	-Diary	3
	-Cleaning together	1
	-Survey	1
	-Moral education	1
	-Encounter method	1
	-Conflict resolution between students	1

(13.89%) cited “very”, and two teachers (2.78%) reported “absolutely”.

Three questions were asked to gauge how often they spend time with students to build a strong teacher-student relationship. The first question was “How confident are you

about the level of communication between you and your students?”. None of the teachers answered “not at all”, three teachers (4.17%) reported “a little”, thirty-eight teachers (52.78%) cited “somewhat”, twenty-eight teachers (38.89%) responded “very”, and three

teachers (4.17%) answered “absolutely”.

The second question was “How often do you spend time with your students outside of classes?”. No teacher answered “never”, while seven teachers (9.72%) replied “rarely”, twenty-eight teachers (38.89%) cited “sometimes”, twenty-five teachers (34.72%) responded “often”, and twelve teachers (16.67%) reported “all the time”. Teachers were asked to describe the answer specifically, and some of the responses were: “talking and playing during lunch break” and “clean the classroom together” (Table 1).

The third question was “How often do you try something (e.g. activities) to know more about your students?”. One teacher (1.41%) answered “never”, nine teachers (12.68%) responded “rarely”, forty-two teachers (59.15%) cited “sometimes”, eighteen teachers (25.35%) reported “often”, and one teacher (1.41%) replied “all the time”. Teachers were asked to describe their answers and some of them cited “individual conversation” and “visiting home” (Table 1).

Three questions, which were to see how often they spend time with students to build a strong teacher-student relationship, were combined into a mean communication variable and the mean was calculated ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ).

A statistical analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between the mean communication variable and the question “How often do you see bullying among students?” ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) variable. The result showed that the teachers with closer relationship with students did not see more bullying than others ( $r = 0.91$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation between the mean communication

variable and the question “How confident are you that there is no bullying in your classroom?” ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) variable showed that the teachers with a strong teacher-student relationship was not certain whether bullying does not exist in their classroom or not ( $r = 0.89$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The result indicated that the hypothesis was not supported. The strong teacher-student relationships did not help teachers to perceive bullying behaviors.

In addition to the main research question, teachers were asked four questions to understand the level of seriousness in bullying and two questions to see the likelihood of intervention in both mental and physical bullying.

#### *Teachers' level of seriousness of bullying*

The first question was “How important is it to educate students about bullying?”. No teacher responded both not at all and “a little”, two teachers (2.78%) answered “somewhat”, eighteen teachers (25%) cited “very”, and fifty-two teachers (72.22%) mentioned “absolutely”.

The second question was “How important is it for the teachers to learn more about bullying prevention?”. No teacher answered both “not at all” and “a little”, four teachers (5.56%) cited “somewhat”, sixteen teachers (22.22%) responded “very”, fifty-two teachers (72.22%) answered “absolutely”.

The third question was “How important is it for the teachers to help a student who is bullied?”. No teacher answered “not at all”, one teacher (1.43%) responded “a little”, two teachers (2.86%) cited “somewhat”, twenty-two teachers (31.43%) teachers

answered “very”, and forty-five teachers (64.29%) reported “absolutely”.

The fourth question was “How important is it for the teachers to deal with a student who bullies others?”. No teacher answered both “not at all” and “a little”, two teachers (2.78%) responded “somewhat”, eleven teachers (15.28%) cited “very”, and fifty-nine teachers (81.94%) stated “absolutely”.

#### *Teachers' bullying intervention*

The first question was “How confident are you about dealing with psychological bullying, such as ignoring a person and writing cruel letters, in your class?”. Three teachers (4.17%) answered “a little”, while thirty-eight teachers (52.78%) responded “somewhat”, twenty-eight teachers (38.89%) cited “very”, and three teachers (4.17%) reported “absolutely”.

The second question was “How confident are you about dealing with physical bullying, such as kicking and punching, in your class?”. Four teachers (5.56%) responded “a little”, twenty-six teachers (36.11%) answered “somewhat”, thirty-three teachers (45.83%) cited “very”, and nine teachers (12.50%) replied “absolutely”.

At the end of questionnaire, teachers were asked to answer the question “What kind of preparation for school bullying have you had? Please list lectures or classes you have taken.” The result showed that twenty-three (31.94%) out of seventy-two teachers had had some kind of anticipation for school bullying. The answers included “meeting among teachers” and “communication with parents.” A complete set of answers can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Responses to the question, “What kind of preparation for school bullying have you had? Please list lectures or classes you have taken.”

Question	Description
What kind of preparation for school bullying have you had? Please list lectures or classes you have taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Discussion of bullying in the classes</li> <li>-Survey about bullying in the school</li> <li>-Classes about human rights</li> <li>-Public speech</li> <li>-Lectures in school</li> <li>-Anti-bullying and hikikomori (withdrawn students) committee</li> <li>-Meetings among teachers</li> <li>-Moral education</li> <li>-Conversation with parents</li> <li>-Conversation with counselors</li> <li>-Meeting with teachers from elementary school</li> <li>-Reading related books</li> <li>-Using related videos and news in classes</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION

The study investigated a question “Do teachers perceive more bullying among students if they are willing to build a strong teacher-student relationship?”

The hypothesis that teachers who spend more time with students to build a strong teacher-students relationship can predict and perceive more bullying behaviors among students was not supported. Teachers who spend more time with their students outside of classes to embrace a closer teacher-student relationship and who have a high level of communication with students indicated that they are not confident enough to say that there is no bullying in the classroom. Likewise, it was suggested that the amount of time teachers spent with their students and the strength of their relationships with students did not predict how often they saw bullying behaviors among students. Teachers who spent more time with their students outside of classes to embrace a teacher-student relationship and who had the highest level of communication with students did not see more bullying than others.

These results suggest two possible explanations. First, it may be true that there is no bullying so teachers simply did not see any bullying. Second, there may be bullying behaviors among students and teachers are not recognizing the behavior. Some forms of bullying are more difficult to detect. According to Liepe-Levinson and Levinson (2005), there are three types of bullying which were verbal, physical, and relational. Since this study focused on bullying that can be observed by teachers, relational bullying that

girls engage in more than boys such as ignoring and isolating might have been neglected. In general, verbal bullying and physical bullying are more noticeable than relational bullying. Since teachers reported their self-perceptions in this study, future studies should include reports from both teachers and students in order to discuss the actual number of bullying behaviors and the detection of the incidents by teachers.

In this study, the results showed that most teachers displayed a serious attitude toward bullying behavior in schools. Besides, this study certainly indicated that a small number of teachers were absolutely confident about their capacity to handle both physical and psychological bullying behaviors as Morita *et al* (1998) mentioned. This result suggests the necessity of teachers to learn more about the characteristics and types of bullying. Similarly, understanding the mechanism of these bullying behaviors would help teachers intervene in and to identify the signs of bullying activities.

In the present study, a concept of strong teacher-student relationships was measured by three questions that the first author decided. The first question was “How confident are you about the level of communication between you and your students?”, the second asked “How often do you spend time with your students outside of classes?”, and the third inquired “How often do you try something (e.g. activities) to know more about your students?”. These questions may not necessarily define or measure a strong teacher-student relationship and further studies are needed in this respect.

Limitations of this study should be

considered in the interpretation of the results and we cannot assume similarities and differences. It is impossible to establish causality from this particular study, and further research should be carried out with a random sample of a broader range of teachers.

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## APPENDICE

### Survey about school bullying

My name is Keita Yamada, and I am working on my senior thesis. You have been selected to fill out a survey about bullying. **Please do not put your name on this survey.** I do not ask for any personal information. I am conducting this study to assess **teachers' attitudes about bullying among students in this school.** Once you have completed this survey, all the survey sheets will be collected, and then sent back to me. Your completion of this survey implies your consent. Thank you for your time.

Please answer the following questions by circling the number on the scale, from 1 to 5, which best describes your experience.

**1. How often do you see bullying among students?**

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time

**Please describe:**

**2. How confident are you that there is no bullying in your classroom?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**3. How important is it to educate students about bullying?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**4. How confident are you about dealing with psychological bullying, such as ignoring and writing cruel letters, in your class?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**5. How confident are you about dealing with physical bullying, such as kicking and punching, in your class?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**6. How important is it for teachers to learn more about bully prevention?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**7. How important is it for the teacher to help a student who is bullied?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**8. How important is it for the teacher to deal with a student who bullies others?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**9. How confident are you about the level of communication between you and your students?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Absolutely

**10. How often do you spend time with your students outside of classes?**

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time

**Please describe:**

**11. How often do you try something (e.g. activities) to know more about your students?**

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time

**Please describe:**

**12. How long have you been teaching?**

Less than 1 year	3-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	More than 15 years
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**13. What aged children do you currently teach?**

**14. What kind of preparation for school bullying have you had? Please list lectures or classes you have taken.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!**

## 日本の学校におけるいじめ予防：教師生徒間の 信頼関係に着目して

山田啓太\* 藤井靖\*\* Ariane SCHRATTER\*\*\* 菅野純\*\*

\*早稲田大学大学院人間科学研究科

\*\*早稲田大学人間科学学術院

\*\*\*Faculty of Psychology, Maryville College

### 要 約

本研究では教師のいじめに対する意識調査を行い、その実態を把握することでいじめ予防のための教師の役割について検討した。小中高の教師86名に対してアンケート調査を行った。具体的には、児童生徒との信頼関係を築こうとする教師はより多くのいじめに気づくのかということに焦点を当てた。その結果仮説は支持されず、児童生徒と良い信頼関係にあるとする教師は自信をもっていじめはないと言い切れず、必ずしもいじめによく気づくということではないことが示された。また今回の調査により、多くの教師は学校でのいじめを深刻に受け止めてはいるものの、いじめにどのように対応すればよいか分からないとしていることが示された。本研究により、いじめを予防するための学校作りや教師のいじめ対応力といったものの必要性が示唆された。

**キーワード**：いじめ，学校，教師，予防