

Running head: DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

Differences in Perceptions of Bullying Between Parents and Their Children:

Differences in Perceptions of Bullying

Lynn Conrad

Metropolitan State College of Denver

## Perceptions of bullying 2

There is little question among researchers and educators that bullying is a problem in schools. While most bully prevention occurs in the school setting (Naylor, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemma, 2006), past research indicates that bully education in the school has little effect on behavior (Hunt, 2007). Alternative approaches should consider parents in bully prevention education (Hunt, 2007; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel & Hayne, 2007; Stevens & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2002). Differences in perception of bullying may negatively impact school-based intervention (Naylor, et al., 2006). The present study examines the differences in perceptions of bullying at different ages and between children and their parents. Two questions guided the study: (a) Do parents' perceptions of bullying differ from their children's perceptions of bullying? (b) Do perceptions of bullying differ at different developmental stages? The research hypotheses were as follows: (a) Parents' perceptions of bullying will differ from their children's perceptions of bullying. (b) Perceptions of bullying will differ at different ages and developmental levels. Participants included 3rd graders (n=31), 8th graders (n=17) and parents of participating children and adolescents (n=48). Participants completed a 16 statement survey adapted from Monks and Smith (2006) that measured perceptions of bullying. Each age group's answers were examined. There were two levels of the independent variable: (a) parents and students, and (b) developmental level. Developmental levels are defined as follows: 3rd grade, 8th grade, and adult. The dependent variable was the survey response indicating perception of bullying. Bullying was operationally defined as: An intentional and repetitive act of hurting another individual physically, socially, and/or emotionally for personal gain, not including teasing done in a friendly manner. Consent was obtained, student participants

completed surveys at school or at a soccer game. In evaluating hypothesis 1, a Chi-square test of independence yielded mixed results indicating that children and parents have significantly different perceptions of bullying on some statements in which the nature of the act includes physical aggression, repetition, and verbal aggression. Nonsignificant differences were found in responses to statements describing relational aggression, benign or prosocial behaviors, imbalance of power, provocation, outcome, and intention. The results of Chi-square test of independence were also mixed in testing hypothesis 2, which predicted developmental differences in perceptions of bullying. Significant differences were found on only one statement with more 3rd graders, but not 8th graders or adults, defining bullying on the single dimension of aggression. Post hoc analysis using standardized residuals supported this finding. The lack of a larger number of significant differences in perception of bullying between children and parents may be attributed to the following limitations: size and homogeneity of the sample, validity of the measure and the lack of qualitative data. While the implications of research on differences in perceptions of bullying are numerous, the limitations of the present study make applying these results to bully education, intervention, and prevention programs difficult. Opportunities for future research addressing the limitations of the present study are discussed in order to better educate the population and reduce bullying in schools.

References

Hunt, C. (2007). The effect of an education program on attitudes and beliefs about bullying an bullying behavior in junior secondary school students. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 12 (1), 21-26.

Monks, C.P., & Smith, P.K. (2006). Definitions of bullying: Age differences in understanding of the term, and the role of experience. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 24(4), 801-821.

Naylor,P., Cossin, F., de Bettencourt, R., & Lemma, F. (2006). Teacher's and pupils' definition of bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(3), 553-576.

Spriggs, A.L., Iannotti, R.J., Nansel, T.R., & Hayne, D.L. (2007). Adolescent bullying involvement and perceived family, peer and school relations: Commonalities and differences across race/ethnicity. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41, 283-293.

Stevens, V. & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2002). Relationship of the family environment to children's involvement in bully/victim problems in school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 31(6), 419-428.