




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Location: Maroon Peak (Grand Hyatt/2nd Floor)

Time of Presentation: Jun 04 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

Category/Theme: Etiology

A Social-Ecological Approach to Bullying Prevention: The Consideration of Individual, Peer- and School-Level Factors

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This paper symposium brings together both basic and prevention research perspectives on a social-ecological approach to bullying prevention. The three papers represent diverse and rigorous methodologies, and includes participants from different developmental stages. Our discussant is a well-known leading scholar in the field of violence prevention and school-based prevention, and our chair is a research scientist at the Centers for Disease Control Injury and Prevention. Two papers are drawn from large-scale etiological studies, and point to the importance of both the individual- and peer-level context in reducing bullying. The first paper examines the role of gender and the cognitive construct of moral disengagement as a predictor of bullying and overt aggression. Findings indicate that moral disengagement explains the association between gender and bullying, and partially accounts for the relation between gender and overt aggression. The second paper examined associations among sex, empathy, attitudes toward bullying, and bullying perpetration among one's peer group, as predictors of willingness to intervene in bullying episodes among middle schoolers. Social network analysis was used to identify bullying perpetration in the peer groups, and multi-level models were used to assess for the relative influence of bullying perpetration in the peer network (Level 2) versus individual characteristics (Level 1). Findings suggest that peer-level influences are relatively more important in bystander behavior for males, compared to females. However, empathy and perspective-taking accounted for a significant proportion of willingness to intervene for females. The third paper utilizes data from a school-randomized controlled trial of the Steps to Respect (STR) program obtained from surveys with school personnel in 33 elementary schools, to examine impact on improving school climate. Results of multilevel analyses of post-test data indicated significant ($p < .05$) differences in perceived bullying-related problems, schools' anti-bullying policies and strategies, and school climate supporting the efficacy of the STR program. Additional within-school analyses revealed large discrepancies between staff and student perceptions of bullying related behaviors and willingness to intervene, which points to the importance of targeting both students and staff in prevention efforts. Taken together, these papers nicely reflect that complex ecology of bullying behavior, the importance of targeting risk factors at the individual, peer- and school-level, and the potential for short-term interventions to positively shift the school climate. Discussion will focus on how we translate these findings into practice and more effective prevention strategies.

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