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Bullying Trends and Reporting Preferences Among an Urban,  
Suburban, and Rural School

Noemi E. Olsen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist

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## ABSTRACT

### BULLYING TRENDS AND REPORTING PREFERENCES AMONG AN URBAN, SUBURBAN, AND RURAL SCHOOL

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Every student has the right to a safe learning environment, yet so many students have been targets of or witnesses of bullying incidents. In spite of school administration efforts to create effective reporting systems and to implement anti-bullying programs, many students remain silent victims. The present study analyzes data collected from a School Safety Survey through SchoolTipline. This data was used to determine the bullying trends, reporting trends, and reporting preferences of 562 7th and 8th grade students at an urban, suburban, and rural school. The results of this study indicate that bullying continues to be a prevalent issue that students face, but a great majority still fail to report these bullying incidents to school personnel. The results also indicate that there are significant differences in regard to bullying among the urban, suburban, and rural schools, which warrant further research.

Keywords: physical bullying, verbal bullying, urban school, suburban school, rural school

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## Introduction

Over the past few years, a lot of emphasis has been placed on school violence, and how to prevent this violence before it happens. With school shootings, such as those at Columbine and Virginia Tech, being broadcast on television, teachers and students are much more worried about maintaining a good school climate and keeping students and faculty safe (Perone, 1998; Kitsantas, 2004). Yet even the most effective administrators, parents, and teachers cannot address negative school incidents if they do not know about them. Many students are reluctant to report such incidents, especially those in middle school and high school. There are many reasons students give as to why they wouldn't report incidents of school violence, such as feeling uncomfortable, and feeling that it is not their responsibility to report (United States Department of Education, 1998).

When looking at ways to improve programs that promote student safety, the need for increased student reporting should be foremost, especially since school boards find that “the perennial challenge of attempting to increase the levels of pupils' reporting of bullying to teachers and parents remains a challenge” (O'Moore & Minton, 2005). It does not matter if there are programs implemented in the schools if the students are not taking an active role in the implementation. Within the framework of the current program, school incidents were still not being resolved. If students do not make use of the policy, awareness is irrelevant. This would require students to increase the amount of reporting, either as a participant or as a witness of school incidents.

There are several factors affecting a student's likelihood of using an anti-bullying program in his/her school. Levels of student reporting are unlikely to increase until schools create an anti-bullying environment. One study explored the conditions under which students are

most likely to report negative peer experiences. Two factors were whether or not the student believed his or her claim would be dealt with and the perceived tolerance toward bullying. Unnever and Cornell (2004) found that many students feared retaliation if they reported, especially if they felt that school authorities were ineffective in preventing or intervening bullying problems. Indeed, victims will not report unless they are sure their problem will be handled without an increase in bullying. For the victim, being ignored when a call for help has been made, as well as experiencing an increasing in the bullying may lead to a feeling of hopelessness. Instead, the students will be more likely to try to cope with the violence, or see it as normal behavior. These issues may then seem like minor incidents that can be overlooked to avoid social rejection and/or retaliation caused by a report to a principal, teacher, or parent.

In efforts to overcome the apprehensions that students may have, as well as satisfying the need to protect from retaliation, several groups have considered possibilities for anonymous reporting such as 24-hour phone hotlines or courtesy “contact telephones” for each school to be available during certain hours of the day (Olweus, 1993). While this method may help students feel safer when reporting, it may not be as effective because of the funding it would require to staff, and the problems that may arise when trying to use the reports to aid the students affected. Other groups, such as Tempus Software Ltd. (n.d.) are starting to explore text messaging and online reporting. Another option is to report anonymously to school administrators through emails using a company known as SchoolSpan, Inc. (n.d.) A Maryland school district offered an online bullying and harassment survey and found that 74% of students in grades 4-10 completed the survey (Grasmick, 2006). In this technologically perceptive generation, an online approach may be the best way to reach students about bullying.

SchoolTipline is an online reporting service that is being made available at over 40 schools nationwide. Last year, SchoolTipline was made available to Dixon Middle School in Provo, UT, where a focus group was conducted by researchers at Brigham Young University. The original pilot study began in 2006 at Dixon Middle School, a local suburban school. The purpose of this study was to collect information from middle school students regarding their willingness to use an online incident reporting system called SchoolTipline. This online system allows students, teachers, and parents to report incidents of school violence, such as bullying and harassment, with the option of anonymity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Researchers conducted a focus group with 21 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at the pilot school using three questionnaires. Based on the students' feedback from the focus group, data were found supporting the hypothesis that students will prefer an online system to traditional reporting methods.

### **Statement of Problem and Purpose**

Exposure to violence in the schools and the surrounding areas “may reduce the quality of teaching, disrupt school classroom discipline, and limit teachers' availability to students before or after the school day, [as well as] reduce students' motivation to attend school, willingness to participate in extracurricular activities, and capacity to attend to and care about academic matters” (Lorian, 1998, p. 295). When there are so many incidents of violence in schools, one may wonder what can be done to ameliorate the situation. One aspect of school violence that requires attention because of its negative short- and long-term effects is bullying.

Even when school personnel try to intervene and prevent bullying from occurring in their schools, their efforts cannot be effective if they do not know when, where, or by whom the incidents are occurring. Many times school administrators are left in the dark because those who know about the bullying incidents are reluctant to report, especially those students in middle

school and high school. While limited resources in personnel or funds may create difficulties in preventing bullying, the lack of student reporting is often the most persistent limitation to even the best-laid programs.

There have been different kinds of reporting systems that have been developed recently, using the telephone and the internet. Many of these programs also have factors, such as the cost to run the program and availability, which decrease its effectiveness in the schools. Research with SchoolTipline has shown that at a Suburban middle school, a majority of the students would feel comfortable using this website as a way to anonymously report incidents of bullying at their school. Unfortunately, a disadvantage of using a focus group method in a study is that the results cannot be generalized to other populations, due to the small number of participants (Marczak & Sewell, n.d.). Although information that was gathered from the focus group may give us valuable information about the students in that suburban middle school, it is hard to know if those results could be generalized to other populations (such as urban or rural school students).

The purpose of the Safe Schools survey, which was information source used in this study, was used to determine students' perceptions of safety at their school and to gain students' views on bullying in their school and their preferences or methods of reporting bullying. The purpose was to analyze the collected data for trends, types, and frequency of reports from Mount Ogden Middle School, Lehi Junior High School, and North Sanpete Middle School. In order to see if the results from the pilot study at the suburban school can be generalized to other student populations, these three schools were chosen to represent the three different geographic demographics (a) urban, (b) suburban, and (c) rural, respectively. It is hoped that the online reporting system and surveys can be used in further research in order to assess the impact and effect that implementing the SchoolTipline anonymous reporting system can have on the

frequency of bullying in middle schools, as well as the school climate. It is also intended that this information will be shared with the administrators of these schools to aid them in determining where, how, and when bullying takes place in and around their schools, so that they can make any appropriate interventions.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to find answers to four research questions:

- 1) How often does verbal and physical bullying occur?
- 2) Where and when does this bullying occur?
- 3) Whom do students report to and how would students prefer to report bullying that they experience or observe?
- 4) Are there any significant differences among the three schools' responses for questions 1-3?

## Review of the Literature

To determine how this study will add to the current literature, an analysis of this must be explored. This exploration of current research has shown that there is a widespread amount of literature on bullying trends and traditional methods of reporting, but there is a sparse amount of literature on non-traditional methods, and research evaluating the effect of geography on bullying and reporting trends.

### Current Literature

Since part of this survey addresses bullying trends of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, a discussion of what bullying is, as well as the prevalence rates of verbal and physical bullying and other bullying trends was included. In addition, research on barriers to reporting, reporting preferences, and the efficacy of common anti-bullying programs are also explored. Finally, studies addressing urban, suburban, and rural schools trends, both in comparison and isolation, was included.

**Bullying.** Bullying is not just playing around or an example of “kids will be kids.” The definition of bullying has generally been agreed upon as the one provided by Dan Olweus, a pioneer in bullying research (1993):

A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative action on the part of one or more other students.... In order to use the term bullying, there should be an imbalance in strength (an asymmetric power relationship): The student who is exposed to the negative actions has difficulty defending him/herself and is somewhat helpless against the student or students who harass. (pp. 9-10)

In addition to providing a definition for bullying, many people have also identified different kinds of bullying: verbal, physical, relational, cyber, direct/indirect, etc. The National School Safety Center has provided examples of direct bullying. Some examples include hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, excessive tickling; verbal threats, name calling, racial slurs, insults; demanding money, property, service; and stabbing, choking, burning and shooting). They have also included examples of indirect bullying. A few of these examples include rejecting, excluding, isolating; ranking or rating, humiliating; manipulating friends and relationships; writing hurtful or threatening e-mails and posting on web sites; and blackmailing, terrorizing, and proposing dangerous dares (Quiroz, Arnette, & Stephens, 2006). This study focuses just on verbal and physical bullying.

***Trends of bullying.*** There have been several large-scale studies that have been done to quantify just how prevalent bullying is in schools. A study by Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt (2001) found that almost a third (29.9%) of their sample (15,000 U.S. junior high and high school students) reported moderate to frequent involvement in bullying. The involvement included those who were the bully, the victim, or fell into both categories (a “bully-victim”). Another study focused solely on those who were considered the victims of bullying. In this study conducted by the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (2001), researchers found that about 14% of the participants taking the survey reported being the victims of bullying within the last six months (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005).

Not surprisingly, bullying often occurs where and when there is less adult supervision. This is most likely to take place on the playground (for elementary school children), in the classroom (when the teacher is not present), in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. This may

also include in and around the school bathrooms (Olweus, 1993; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2004). Of course, where bullying occurs may be affected by the school (elementary vs. secondary), or on the kinds of bullying it is (indirect vs. direct).

One study states that possible reasons for bullying in certain locations has to do with territoriality and places in the schools that are considered to be undefined public space (spaces in the schools that may not be seen as anyone's responsibility to monitor or maintain), such as bathrooms, hallways, and playgrounds. These areas tend to be more violence-prone during times when they are highly frequented (before/after school, in between classes, during recess, etc.). This study also found that subcontexts perceived as crowded, and where "smaller" students interacted with "bigger" students (stairwells, hallways) were considered unsafe places. In addition, middle school students identified a greater number of unsafe places than elementary school students (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001).

***Negative effects.*** There are often both short-term and long-term negative effects for the target as well as for the bully. Some of these effects may include problems in the areas of physical health, emotional adjustment, academic problems, peer relationships, and even alcohol use (Nansel et al, 2004). Other more serious long-term effects for bullies include higher risk for criminal behavior, and increased aggression toward spouse and children, while targets may be at higher risk for depression, lower self-esteem, and more interpersonal problems than peers who were neither bullies nor targets (Olweus & Limber, 1999; Smokowki & Kopasz, 2005).

**Reporting.** In order for school violence prevention to be more effective, the students who know what is happening must place the responsibility upon their shoulders to report (Stone & Isaacs, 2002). Unfortunately, over one-third of students do not report incidents of bullying to school personnel because they are afraid of retaliation, lack reporting-skills, and feel that

teachers and administrators do nothing to prevent bullying from happening (Batsche & Knoff, 1993; Oliver 1994). Students are more likely to take an active role in keeping their school safe when they feel a sense of ownership within their school (Barras & Lyman, 2000). If the students are not actively involved in the bullying incidents, they are often witnesses of it happening, oftentimes in areas where there is less adult supervision. In so many cases, students have known ahead of time that acts of school violence, such as bullying, were going to occur, and yet have not told any adults. Some reasons why students failed to report impending school violence include peer pressure, fear of retaliation, and a lack of understanding their role in keeping their school safe. (Stone & Isaacs, 2002). In order to increase the amount of student reporting, efforts must be taken to improve student-administration relations and to help students feel greater responsibility towards keeping their school safe.

***Barriers of reporting.*** In order for a student to take the chance of reporting, he/she needs to trust the administrators. One study by Unnever and Cornell (2004) investigated what would encourage students to report negative peer experiences. Two factors from the study included whether or not the student believed his or her claim would actually be dealt with, and the perceived tolerance toward bullying. In fact, victims may have feared retaliation because many of the students believed that authorities don't really intervene when bullying does occur. In order for students to take the risk of reporting, they must believe that the administrators care about them and the school, and are willing to do something about the situation. This can be accomplished by having administrators respond effectively to students' reports of bullying incidents.

When students perceive that school administrators are being proactive in working to decrease bullying, and are aware of what their options are to report, they will be more likely to

do so. However, there are some “proactive” measures that are not (as perceived by students as being) effective. Despite the lack of evidence demonstrating effectiveness, many schools combat bullying problems by increasing security. As explained by Kohn (2004), we cannot expect that schools will be safer because of the numerous supervised cameras or metal detectors being installed. Instead, measures need to be taken to improve human relations (Noguera as cited in Kohn, 2004). In order to increase communication with students, administrators must first show that they care for them as individuals, which can be done by “building a system that includes respecting and carefully handling students’ confidences” (Stone & Isaacs, 2002, p. 55). It is impossible for administrators to be everywhere at every moment and so they will not see every incidence of bullying that takes place. However, they will not have to be everywhere if they create a system allowing positive and effective two-way communication, thereby creating a sense of trust with the students and increasing rates of reporting. One way to encourage this communication is by providing anonymity and confidentiality.

Even when students knew about incidents of bullying, they failed to report because of peer pressure and fear of retaliation. In order for students to report, they must feel a certain level of safety (Stone & Isaacs, 2002). This safety is often felt when a level of anonymity is provided, allowing students to report without feeling endangered physically or socially due to retaliation. The hope is that students will be more likely to report bullying incidents they either experience or witness, which may lead to a decrease in bullying. In addition, if anonymous reporting makes students more willing to report, then administrators can be more aware of bullying issues in their school and be more effective when intervening.

***Methods of reporting.*** Traditional methods of reporting can be defined as written or verbal reports of an incident made by a student to the school administrators, counselors, or

teachers. Many times students do not have many options when it comes to reporting bullying incidents. When reporting involves personal interaction and a lack of anonymity, many students would rather not report, leaving the incident unresolved. One reason traditional reporting methods are mainly used in schools is due to a lack of research in the effectiveness of alternate reporting methods (Juvonen & Graham, 2004). Many schools continue to use traditional ways of reporting, even when it is not as effective, because they have not been exposed to other forms of reporting. Other forms of traditional methods for handling bullying include metal detectors, training faculty, school officers, zero tolerance, and weapons hotlines, which have shown to have no long-term effects for bullying prevention (Johnson & Johnson 1995). These traditional reporting methods are part of a school's whole bullying prevention and intervention program. Clearly, further research needs to be done regarding alternative methods, and schools need to be made aware of effective policies.

In addition to using traditional methods of reporting, some schools are now using more non-traditional methods of reporting. These non-traditional methods often use different forms of technology to report bullying incidents. Two non-traditional methods of reporting use telephones. A phone line has been set up in the United Kingdom to increase access for students, while providing a sense of anonymity (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, n.d.). Another method, Bully Text, is using text messaging to report bullying from quickly and effectively (Tempus Software Ltd, n.d.). Many of these new non-traditional methods of reporting overcome problems with anonymity and accessibility.

On the other hand, these methods also have other aspects which may prevent them from being truly accessible and appealing for students and administrators to use in a local, school setting. A phone line requires resources, funds, and personnel that may make this method

difficult for some schools to implement, and some students in smaller schools may still fear that someone would recognize their voices when reporting. Another potential problem that the program Bully Text may have is the inefficiency of one person, such as the principal or counselor who receives all of the texts. Although there are many aspects of non-traditional reporting that can be beneficial to both victims of bullying for reporting purposes, as well as to school administrators in dealing with bullying, there is not a lot of research that has been done on just how effective non-traditional anti-bullying programs are. More research needs to be done to determine the true effectiveness of non-traditional methods.

Even though non-traditional methods have not been tried and tested, research has been conducted regarding what elements make a successful prevention/intervention program. In a study conducted internationally, Carney and Merrell found a common fault in current anti-bullying programs. “What they all lack is an evaluative/continuous feedback component to gauge program effectiveness and maintain awareness and motivation.” These researchers called for a program involving the schools, parents, and children along with “permanent and all-inclusive intervention/prevention” (p. 380). Their research showed that in order “to make a substantive difference, long-term commitment to promotion of a positive environment is crucial, as are data-based accountability measures which gauge the effectiveness of intervention and suggest modifications as they are needed” (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Traditional methods and new non-traditional methods as mentioned previously lack either a positive environment or efficiency and organization.

***Overcoming barriers.*** Successful intervention programs are those, which combine parent, student, and administrative awareness and evaluation. With everyone involved in a databased system, an anti-bullying environment will be created where all can feel confident and

comfortable reporting incidents. SchoolTipline is an exploration of another non-traditional method that includes many of the features laid out by Carney and Merrell (2001). Students can access this system online, 24 hours a day. Their report is sent immediately and directly to school authorities. This provides a method for administrators and students to communicate and give each other “continuous feedback” about the bullying conditions in their school. SchoolTipline is easily implemented into schools and, with the proper advertising, all students can be aware of the program and have the option of reporting. This program encourages students to be more aware of the bullying that occurs in the schools and allows the students to report these incidents with the comfort of anonymity. Students who report can also feel a stronger sense of ownership because they have the option of tracking their report and can follow-up on how it is being handled by the school administration.

A focus group had already been conducted with 21 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in a suburban middle school in Utah. The purpose of that study was to gain a better understanding of what students’ responses to the web site were concerning its usability, effectiveness, etc. The benefit of the focus group is that it allowed the researchers to learn from the students, first-hand, about any potential problems the program may have, while taking note of the aspects of the program that appeal to the students, because of the informal nature of the discussion and open-ended question and answers.

**Geography.** Lorion (1998) wrote that “a school setting is ‘contaminated’ by the attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that students and teachers carry from other settings into the school, as well as by their immediate experiences within the school” (p. 295). There are many studies that analyze the differences in bullying trends based on ethnicity, gender, and age. On the other hand, there have not been many studies done on the differences in bullying trends based

on geographic location. In the book, *Schools Make a Difference*, Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) outlined 16 differences in schools based on geographic locations (urban, suburban, and rural). These differences are based around the four areas of the community and district office; leadership; faculty and instructional organization; and curriculum and professional development.

In *Violence in American Schools*, Laub and Lauritsen (1998) wrote a chapter in which they were able to identify several community factors that affect a school's climate. These include gang activity, neighborhood wealth (tied to school funding), etc. They also talked about the influence of a community's "social capital," which consists of "physical capital" (material resources) and "human capital" (an individual's own skills and knowledge). When a school is located in a community with high social capital, it can offset other factors that may influence a student's success or safety in the school (Laub & Lauritsen, 1998).

The geographic location and the community in which a school is set influence the school and its students. One study (Kitsantas, Ware, & Martinez-Arias, 2004) provides a few reasons why and how the community affects the students and their perceptions of safety in their schools. One reason is that students are affected by the amount of violent behavior they are exposed to in the neighborhoods where they live. So, the more exposure they have to violence in their neighborhoods, the more trouble they experience in schools. Another reason is that the community's priorities, concerns, and interests, influence the safe school plan the school implements.

In order for a safe school plan to be effective, it often needs to involve the community (mental health professionals, law enforcement professionals, religious and community leaders, etc.). In addition, Kitsantas et al. (2004) state that "community safety and school safety relative to the community do influence adolescents' perceptions of school safety" (p. 423). Results from

this study also suggest that the safety of the community may affect the perceptions adolescents have of their school environment, and that adolescents “judge their safety in their school in terms of the safety of their communities” (p.424). Another interesting finding is that the school safety actions (the physical actions a school takes to ensure safety) were predicted by community safety, as opposed to relative school safety. This concept of the safety of the community affecting the perceived safety of the school is also supported by a study conducted by Sarason (1996), which states that students and teachers tend to bring their experiences with violence from the neighborhood into their schools, leading to “contamination.”

***Comparative trends.*** More research needs to be done on the comparison of trends in the schools based on geographic location (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural). Two studies looked at the differences between rural, suburban, and urban schools in terms of dating violence. A study by Bergman (1992) show that students in urban and suburban schools reported higher rates of violence than rural schools, while the study by Spencer and Bryant (2000) shows that students in rural schools are at greater risk for participating in dating violence than their suburban and urban counterparts. Both studies agree, however, that the location of the school in terms of geography should be considered an independent variable that requires further study.

Another study looked at the differences in health risks of junior and senior high school students based on the location of their school (suburban, urban, or rural). This study (Atav & Spencer, 2002) has shown that a significantly higher percentage of students in rural schools engage in tobacco and alcohol use, as well as use other drugs frequently than their urban and suburban counterparts (almost twice as likely). Similar significant results were also found in the areas of sexual activity, having a history of pregnancy, bringing a knife, club, or other weapon to

school, carrying a knife, club, or other weapon in the community, bringing a gun to school (almost twice as likely as their urban counterparts), and carrying a gun in the community.

Weist, Myers, Danforth, and McNeil (2000) conducted a study that compared the differences between urban, suburban, and rural schools in terms of internalizing/externalizing problems and stressors, and mental health supports. While the study did not find many differences between the schools at the elementary level, they did find significant results at the middle school and high school level. One finding is that students in the urban areas were reported to have encountered high stress and present more severe internalizing problems than students in rural or suburban areas. These stressors include exposure to violence, crime, parental unemployment, domestic conflict, and familial alcohol and drug abuse. Substance abuse was reported to be a greater problem for urban students than their suburban or rural counterparts at the middle school level, but that trend seems to switch at the high school level.

The results of this study also show that urban schools also have the lowest number of mental health support in the schools (based on number of serious barriers to mental health support, and the number of hours provided in the school per week by mental health providers). Although the students in the urban schools reported having the highest number of internalizing problems, they received the least amount of mental health support (Weist et al., 2000). Very few studies comparing the safety of students in suburban, urban, and rural schools have been done.

***Isolated school trends.*** Although there are studies related to dating violence, exposure to violence in the community, weapons in the schools, and perceptions of school safety, there are no comparative studies targeting bullying trends specifically. In order to get a better understanding of bullying trends in suburban, urban, and rural schools, one must look at studies that just target an urban, suburban, or rural demographic.

*Urban.* In 1996, the National Center for Educational Statistics put out a report on trends in urban schools in comparison to rural and suburban schools, and found that students and teachers in urban schools reported feeling less safe and higher amounts of at-risk behaviors. One finding is that 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in urban schools were more likely to report not feeling safe in their school (13% compared to 8% each of suburban and rural schools). Urban teachers were more than twice as likely to perceive weapons possession as a problem in their schools, as compared to their suburban and rural counterparts. Teachers reported that alcohol use was less of a problem in their schools than suburban or rural school teachers, although they reported that drug use was more of a problem (United States Department of Education, 1996).

In the book, *Violence in American Schools*, Raymond Lorion (1998) wrote a chapter in which he cited several studies regarding the negative effects students in urban schools experience because of exposure to violence. Some of these effects include higher levels of generalized emotional distress, as noted by Saltzman's study (as cited in Lorion, 1998, p.302), greater feeling of depression, anxiety, anger and general distress, as well as lower scores for self-esteem and social competence, as reported by Singer and colleagues. Other studies attribute exposure to violence with depression and other stress-related disorders, even comparing it to post-traumatic stress disorder. These negative effects then adversely affect attendance to homework, the ability to concentrate, and found it difficult not to be distracted by memories of traumatic events and sights. This exposure has also been correlated with subsequent antisocial and violent behavior, including increased aggression, conduct disorder, and truancy.

Although many students in urban areas are exposed to violence, it is difficult to determine just how many students have been involved in bullying at the schools. The prevalence rates in urban schools vary from 24% participation (Fleschler Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham,

2006) to over 72% participation (Hess & Atkins, 1998). More recent studies with urban school participants tend to focus on differences in bullying trends based on ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The study conducted by Fleschler et al. (2006) compared bullying trends of Black and Hispanic students, noting that Black students were more likely to be considered a bully or victim than Hispanic students. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Clubb et al., 2001).

A study by Kilpatrick Demaray and Kerres Malecki (2003) looked at the correlation between bullying and social supports. They found that a large percentage (60-75%) reported having been verbally bullied at least one time in the previous year, with about 5% of students having been victims or more serious bullying behaviors. They also reported that the participants in the comparison group (those students not involved in bullying as either bully, victim, or bully/victim) received a statistically higher amount of social support than the bully, victim and bully/victim (especially from teachers), but that those labeled as victim or bully/victim reported social support as being more important.

A study conducted by Neft (2007) reported several findings related to prevalence rates in the urban school compared with rural schools, teacher vs. self-reported bullying prevalence rates, and the social and emotional skills of those involved in bullying as compared to those not involved. First, the study showed that the bullying prevalence rates were higher and more stable than the rates of rural, non-minority schools. It also reported that the teachers only agreed with the self-reports of bullying one-third of the time, indicating that teachers and students are privy to different information and most likely have different biases. Bullies and bully/victims were classified as having aggressive, externalizing, and hyperactive behaviors, while non-involved

students were characterized by the absence of these problem behaviors. On the other hand, victims were characterized as having internalizing behaviors.

Two other studies looked at the characteristics of students in urban schools who were classified as bullies and victims. One study reported peer-nominated bullies as scoring high on the scales of Bullying Behavior, Athletic Competence, and Behavioral Conduct. Victims received lower scores on the Social Acceptance, Scholastic Achievement, Athletic Competence, Behavioral Conduct, Physical Appearance, and Self-Worth scales (Engert, 2002). The other study looked at which characteristics would increase the likelihood of someone being classified as a bully. Results showed that participants who endorsed higher normative beliefs about aggression (it is okay to hit, shove, etc.), and showed lower levels of empathy, increased their likelihood of being classified as a relational bully by 20%. If those participants had a high level of empathy, the likelihood dropped to 1% (Esposito, 2007).

*Suburban.* A few studies have been done in the elite suburban schools regarding violent behaviors, such as bullying, teasing, hazing, and carrying weapons to school. After interviewing several students at an elite suburban high school, Stoudt (2006) found that the students described a school that created not only an academically competitive place (as described by 96% of participants), but a socially competitive place as well (as described by 57%). The students described their all-male school as a place where it was commonplace to use teasing, hazing, and verbal abuse to establish what was acceptable and not acceptable by the students at the school. Acceptance of these actions is required to be “accepted” by other students at the school.

Another study by Hawkins, Campanero, Bice, Pitts, and Steiner (2002) focused more on the weapons use in affluent suburban high schools. They found that despite the social support from home and the high SES, weapons use among suburban teens exist at a high rate. Over one-

third of the participants reported having carried a weapon to school for protection or to use in case of a fight. In addition, almost half of the participants reported knowing a friend who has brought a weapon to school. Even without the at-risk factors of poverty, high neighborhood violence, or lack of social supports at home, the prevalence rates at the school were at about the national average.

One study (Burger, 2007) looked at the prevalence rates of bullying (both those who have observed bullying and those who have engaged in bullying), what behaviors students consider to be bullying, teasing, sexual harassment, or none of the above. Based on the listed behaviors, results indicate that 80-90% of students observe moderate levels of verbal, relational, or physical bullying in their school, overall, while about 50% of students reports having observed more severe levels of bullying. The study also shows that bullying is a serious problem in the schools. About 54% of students report to having been verbally bullied, 48% reported being the victim of relational bullying, and 37% reported having been physically bullied. Meanwhile, about 40% reported having verbally bullied someone, 35% have relationally bullied someone, and about 21% physically bullied someone. These rates may not be accurate as students did not always consider certain behaviors to be bullying. For example, only about 53% of students considered calling someone a hurtful name to be bullying.

Likewise, another study reported the bullying prevalence rates of elementary school students at a suburban district in Georgia as nearly 60% participation: 33% identified as victims, 2.4% as bullies, 13.7% as bully/victims, and 10.7% as marginally involved (Hunt, 2002). Hunt reported verbal bullying to be most prevalent, followed by relational aggression, and then physical aggression. Some of the most popular coping mechanisms used by the students includes ignoring them, talking to the bully, or telling someone at home. The study did report

that about 65% of the students would report to the teacher if they were being bullied, and that about 69% would tell the teacher if they saw another person getting bullied, but there have not been studies done on whether these reporting trends would continue as the students get older. In addition, the survey question asks the students what they would do if they were bullied, not what they did when they were bullied, which may affect the amount of actual reporting to school personnel.

A study by Reuter-Rice (2006) looked at the psychosocial effects of male students who were victimized at their suburban high school. Of those who participated, 25.5% reported to being victims, and half of those victims had been victimized at least 5 times in the last month. Seventy percent of those who were identified as victims also reported severe anxiety and concern of school violence. This was especially true for those victims who were African-American.

Meanwhile, another study focused on the effects that bullying had on female students involved in bullying. The study shows that 20% of the participants at suburban high schools were exposed to direct or indirect bullying, about 10% bullied other students, and 6% reported that teachers were bullied by students at least once a week. Results also indicated that a majority of the bullying took place at school, and that even one-time bullying events had long-lasting negative effects. Although the presence of the teacher was effective in reducing bullying incidents, most of the participants believed that parents and teachers were either unaware of the bullying that was taking place, or did not care (Lampert, 1998). Another study reported that bullying negatively affects males in terms of self-definition, and females in terms of interpersonal relationships (Sacco, 2002).

*Rural.* More literature is being gathered to dispel the myth that bullying only occurs in urban schools. Several studies have found that violence takes place in a majority of rural

schools. For example, the National School Board Administration found that of 700 schools in the study, violence and assault were predominant in 69% of those schools (Bachus, 1994). A study conducted by Hoover, Oliver and Hazler (1992) found that 72-81% of rural middle and high school students were bullied sometime during their school experience. Likewise, another study found that 82% of students at rural elementary and middle schools were bullied in a three-month period (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, & Blackburn, 2004).

It is hard to determine just how much students are being bullied in their schools. A study by Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, and Sarvela (2002) compared the students' perceptions of bullying to those of the parents and the teachers of those schools. Results showed that the percentage of students who reported having experienced a verbal (76%) or physical (66%) bullying incident in a one-week period was much higher than the subjective assessment that they have been bullied. This is concurrent with other studies, which state that students are unlikely to report that they have been bullied unless the incidents are frequent or severe (Dulmus, et al, 2004). In addition, students were less likely than parents or teachers to believe that verbal, exclusionary, or physical behaviors constitute bullying.

Those involved in bullying incidents also experience other consequences. In a study by Estell, Farmer, and Cairns (2007), where 30% of the sample were identified as either a bully or a victim, both bullies and victims were more likely to be rejected by peers. However, victims tended to be more isolated, while those who were considered to be bullied were viewed as leaders by both their peers and teachers. Another study looked at how students in rural schools coped when they are the targets of overt and relational aggression. They found that 6<sup>th</sup> graders were more likely to implement distancing and internalizing strategies for coping with relational aggression than with overt aggression, while 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were more likely to implement support-

seeking strategies. Sixth graders were also more likely to implement externalizing strategies to cope with overt aggression than with relational aggression (Roecker Phelps, 2001).

In addition to coping with the bullying behaviors, students who are bullied also have a more negative attitude toward school than their non-bullied counterparts, and have a greater fear of being bullied. The study by Dulmus et al. (2004) also found that almost half of the non-bullied students felt sorry for those who were bullied and wanted to help them. Unfortunately, a large percentage of the students (both bullied and non-bullied) believed that teachers do little or nothing to counteract bullying in the school. These findings support the hypothesis by Olweus (1993) that a lack of communication about bullying contributes to the high prevalence rates in rural areas, which leads to a lower awareness of it occurring in the school.

### **Current Limitations**

The results of this review of literature indicate that there is plenty of research that has been done on bullying, and that bullying continues to be an area of concern that affects many students in the secondary schools. Another area of concern is that much of the incidents of bullying and other school violence is not reported to school personnel, making it difficult to prevent future incidents from occurring or punishing those who commit acts of school violence. There is, however less research on non-traditional ways of reporting, such as using a telephone hotline, text messaging, or a website to report bullying incidents. As more and more schools are looking at these non-traditional methods to combat bullying, there is a greater need for additional research in this area. Another area that requires more attention is the affect that geographic location has on a school setting. Research has shown that the community that surrounds a school affects the school and the students that attend it (Lorion, 1998) and that there are definite differences between an urban, suburban, and rural school (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). Current

research has compared other aspects of school violence and at-risk behaviors, but very little current research has been done comparing the bullying trends and reporting preferences of schools in an urban, suburban, and rural setting.

## Method

The sections included in this chapter provide information on the participants used in this study and how they were chosen, describe the survey used, and discuss the measures and procedures used to collect the data.

### Participants

For this study, about 1,600 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were selected to participate from 3 schools in Utah. Mount Ogden Middle School, an urban school in Ogden, UT, was chosen to represent the urban demographic. Lehi Junior High School, a suburban school in Lehi, UT, was chosen to represent the suburban demographic. North Sanpete Middle School, a rural school in Moroni, UT, was chosen to represent the rural demographic. In order to determine which schools would be chosen for the study, each middle school and junior high school in Utah was placed in one of the following categories: small, midsize, or large city; small, midsize, or large suburb; or fringe, distant, or remote rural area, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (see Appendix A for geographic definitions). According to these definitions, Mount Ogden Middle School was classified as a small city, Lehi Junior High was classified as a large suburban school, and North Sanpete Middle School was categorized as a distant rural school.

Mount Ogden Middle School is located in Ogden, UT. Ogden is a small city with a population of about 77,000 people and covers 27 square miles. Mount Ogden Middle School was one of three middle schools in the city limits (Ogden City, n.d.). During the 2008-2009 school year, Mount Ogden Middle School consisted of 859 students, 547 of which were in either the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At Mount Ogden Middle School, 69.8% of the students were economically disadvantaged (receives free or reduced lunch). The student body consisted of the following: 51.6% White, 41.8% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian, 3.1% Black, and less than 1% American

Indian/Alaskan Native. The students were also 51.2% Male and 48.8% Female (United States Department of Education, n.d.). For the study, only a select number of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from specific classes at Mount Ogden Middle School were selected to participate (about 200 students).

Lehi Junior High is located in Lehi, Utah. As of July 2007, the population of Lehi, Utah was 36,885 (Onboard Informatics, 2008). During the 2008-2009 school year, Lehi Junior High School contained 1,069 students, 720 of which were in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At Lehi Junior High School, 22.6% of the students were economically disadvantaged (receives free or reduced lunch). The student body consisted of 93.3% White, 4.1% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, less than 1% Black, and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The students were also 52.4% Male and 47.6% Female (United States Department of Education, n.d.). In this study, all 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Lehi Junior High were selected to participate.

North Sanpete Middle School is located in Moroni, UT. As of July 2007, the population of Moroni, Utah was 1,294 (Onboard Informatics, 2008). North Sanpete Middle School was the only Middle School in Moroni, UT, and the student population was drawn from five communities in central Utah: Fairview, Mount Pleasant, Spring City, Moroni, and Fountain Green (North Sanpete Middle School, n.d.). During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 336 students at North Sanpete Middle School, all of which were in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At North Sanpete Middle School, 57.7% of the students were economically disadvantaged (receives free or reduced lunch). The student body consisted of 88.4% White, 9.8% Hispanic, less than 1% Asian, less than 1% Black, and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The students were also 44.3% Male and 55.7% Female (IES, n.d.). Because the school only consisted of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> students, all students were selected to participate.

## **Measures**

Data were collected using the Safe Schools Survey available at [www.schooltipline.com](http://www.schooltipline.com). This survey was developed by researchers at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT. This online survey was a 16-question anonymous survey about bullying and school safety. The questions of this survey asked for demographic information (gender, ethnicity, grade level), as well as information about the frequency of bullying: how often it occurs, where it occurs, and when it occurs. Some of the questions also asked about how bullying was reported at their school: if they felt comfortable reporting, if they would feel more comfortable using an anonymous online website, and so forth. For those students whose primary language was Spanish, a Spanish version of the survey was also provided online.

The survey consisted of 16 multiple-choice questions. Seven of those questions required that the student select each option that applied to him/her. There were also five questions that provided for an “Other” category or provided a way for the student to explain his/her response (see Appendices B and C for survey questions). The reliability of the survey was measured using a test/re-test method (see Procedures section for details).

## **Procedures and Data Collection**

School administration at the selected schools met with the researchers and were given an overview of the SchoolTipline program, as well as the surveys that the students were given. They were also given the parental consent forms to be used. After receiving written approval from each school principal or assistant principal, the school administration was contacted to set up dates, times, procedures, and places for the surveys. The Institutional Review Board of Brigham Young University approved the analyses for the study.

After the participants in each school were selected, active parental consent forms were collected by teachers and other school administration. Each school provided their own incentive for getting the students to participate. Both the rural and urban schools provided candy as an incentive, while the suburban school offered either class credit or extra credit. After all the consent forms were collected, there were 70 participants from the urban school, 419 participants from the suburban school, and 74 participants from the rural school. There were no negative consequences for a student who refused to participate, or whose parent did not give consent.

Handouts were given to the participating students, providing step-by-step instructions on how to take the survey (see Appendix C). In addition, the students were instructed either by the researchers, or by school administration that were trained by the researchers. In order for the student to take the survey online, they had to provide their assent by clicking on a box that stated that they agree to the conditions of the study, and which provided additional information when requested.

One class (about 20-30 students) from each school was chosen to also participate in the reliability testing of the survey. Each of those students took the survey the first time then took the same survey again two days later. Each of these participating students was given a case ID so that their two surveys could be matched and analyzed for reliability. The participants for the reliability testing consisted of 9 students from the urban school, 28 students from the suburban school, and 11 students from the rural school. The purpose of conducting the reliability testing was to determine if the Safe School survey, created by SchoolTipline and a research team from Brigham Young University, yielded consistent results. This would indicate that the respondents had a fairly good understanding of what was being asked, and could accurately respond.

## Results

This section analyzes the demographics of the participants, discusses the reliability of the survey, and provides the descriptive and analytical data from the survey. There were twelve questions examined in this study, one of which had a qualitative component. The quantitative results are provided, followed by the qualitative analysis.

### Participants

Of the 70 students at the urban school who provided positive parental consent and completed the online survey, 39 (56.5%) were females and 31 (44.3%) were males. Ethnically, 22 students (31.9%) identified themselves as being White, 39 (56.5) students as Hispanic, 2 (2.9%) as Asian, 1 (1.4%) as Native American/Alaskan American, 2 (2.9%) as African American, and 2 (2.9%) as Other. Forty-three (62.3%) of the students were in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, while 27 (38.6%) were in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

There were 710 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at the suburban school. Of those students, 419 students (59.0%) provided positive parental consent and completed the online survey. Two hundred twenty-six (53.9%) were females, 192 (45.8%) were males, and one participant (0.3%) chose not to specify. Ethnically, 335 students (80.0%) identified themselves as being White, 27 (6.4%) students as Hispanic, 9 (2.1%) as Asian, 3 (0.7%) as Pacific Islander, 7 (1.7%) as Native American/Alaskan American, 6 (1.4%) as African American, and 22 (5.3%) as Other. One hundred eighty-nine of the students (45.1%) were in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, while 230 (54.9%) were in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Of the 336 seventh and eighth grade students at the rural school, 74 (22.0%) students received positive parental consent and completed the online survey. Thirty-nine (52.7%) were females and 35 (47.3%) were males. Ethnically, 68 (91.9%) students identified themselves as

being White, 2 (2.7%) students as Hispanic, 0 (0.0%) as Asian, 1 (1.4) as Native American/Alaskan American, 1 (1.4%) as African American, and 2 (2.7%) as Other. Fifty-one (68.9%) of the students were in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, while 23 (31.1%) were in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Reliability**

Reliability testing was conducted to determine the consistency of the responses produced by the questions of the survey. This was done by having a number of respondents answer the survey questions, and then answer the same survey questions two days later. A total of forty-five students from the three schools participated in the reliability testing. A ratio was calculated to determine the percentage of students whose responses were consistent from Time 1 to Time 2 (see Table 1). If a response was missing for a question during Time 1 or Time 2, that response was not used to determine the reliability ratio for that question. A reliability ratio equaling 80% and above was considered acceptable. There were two questions that received a reliability ratio equaling below 80%. Question 1, “*At school, how often have YOU been teased, made fun of, taunted, gossiped about, (verbally bullied) by the same person in the past two months?*” received a reliability percentage of 68.2%, and Question 2, “*At school, how often have YOU been kicked, hit, shoved, tripped, (physically bullied) by the same person in the past two months?*” received a reliability percentage of 59.1%. Ten of the 14 changes in response for Question 1 were a one point difference (i.e. changing the response from *Once* to *Two to three times*). Likewise, 15 of the 18 changes in response for Question 2 were a one point difference. It is possible that the students may have changed their responses for these two questions if they 1) thought about other times they had been bullied in the last two months, or 2) were actually bullied during those two days.

Table 1

*Reliability of student responses from Time 1 to Time 2*

Question	Ratio from Time 1 to Time 2	Percent
How often verb bullied?	30/44	68.2%
How often phys bullied?	26/44	59.1%
Where were you bullied?		
School bus	43/45	95.6%
Classroom	41/45	91.1%
Bathroom	44/45	97.8%
Playground	45/45	100%
Hallways	40/45	88.9%
Lunchroom	40/45	88.9%
On the way home	43/45	95.6%
Never happened	43/45	95.6%
When were you bullied?		
Before school	40/45	88.9%
Between classes	40/45	88.9%
During class	43/45	95.6%
During lunch	41/45	91.1%
After school	42/45	93.3%
Never happened	43/45	95.6%
You, who did you report to?		
Parent	42/45	93.3%
Friend	36/45	80.0%
Teacher	44/45	97.8%
Office	43/45	95.6%
No one	36/45	80.0%
Never happened	40/45	88.9%
Report if anonymous?	39/45	86.7%
How would you prefer to report?	39/43	90.7%
Would you use the website?	25/28	89.3%
Else, who did you report to?		
Parent	42/45	93.3%
Friend	42/45	93.3%
Teacher	42/45	93.3%
Office	40/45	88.9%
No one	38/45	84.4%
Never happened	40/45	88.9%
Gender	44/44	100%
Grade	45/45	100%
Ethnicity	43/44	97.7%

The three demographics questions were expected to have 100% reliability. For question 14, which asked the respondents to determine their gender, every response was consistent from Time 1 to Time 2, with the exception of one student who did not respond the second time, after responding the first time. Question 15 asked the respondents to determine their grade, to which every respondent answered the same from Time 1 to Time 2. Question 16 asked the respondents to determine their ethnicity, to which every respondent the same from Time 1 to Time 2, except one. This student changed the response from *White/Caucasian* to *African American*.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data was analyzed using a mixed method approach. The quantitative data collected from the survey was analyzed in two parts using SPSS. The first part used descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of the responses. The second part used non-parametric analytical statistics to determine any statistically significant differences among the three schools. Due to the ordinal nature of the responses for Questions 1 and 2, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine significant differences, while a Chi-Square test was used for the remaining questions due to their nominal responses. Once a significant difference was determined, One-way ANOVA Post hoc Tukey tests were run to determine which schools had significantly different responses. Although an ANOVA test is a parametric test, it was used because there were no non-parametric tests to determine where the significant differences were. Questions 6, 10, 12, and 13 were not analyzed in this study because they do not relate directly to the four research questions.

Because of the relatively small number of participants,  $p$  values of less than .05 were viewed as statistically significant. The qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive approach. The researchers used verbatim responses to group the responses with common

characteristics. The researchers then grouped the characteristics into larger domains and recurring themes. One researcher created the domains, and a separate researcher reviewed those responses and domains. Discrepancies were resolved by the two researchers until an agreement was reached.

**Bullying trends.** The first question of the survey asked students how often they had been verbally bullied in the past two months. Respondents were given several options: *Never*, *Once*, *Two to three times*, *About once a week*, and *Several times a week*. These responses were each given a value ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*Several times a week*). Of the 70 respondents from the urban school, 29 answered *Never*; 15 answered *Once*; 8 answered *Two to three times*; 6 answered *About once a week*; and 12 answered *Several times a week*. Of the 419 respondents from the suburban school, 180 answered *Never*; 75 answered *Once*; 75 answered *Two to three times*; 40 answered *About once a week*; 48 answered *Several times a week*; and 1 student did not respond. Of the 74 respondents from the rural school, 19 answered *Never*; 11 answered *Once*; 16 answered *Two to three times*; 12 answered *About once a week*; and 15 answered *Several times a week*. One student did not respond to this question (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked how often they were verbally bullied in the last two months.*

Responses	Urban n = 70	School	
		Suburban n = 418	Rural n = 73
Never	41.4%	43.0%	26.0%
Once	21.4%	17.9%	15.1%
2-3 Times	11.4%	17.9%	21.9%
About once a week	8.6%	9.5%	16.4%
Several times a week	17.1%	11.5%	20.6%

The Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the three schools. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference among the three schools ( $p = .003$ ). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the respondents at the rural school reported a significantly greater amount of verbal bullying than those at the suburban school ( $p = .002$ ) (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning how often they had been verbally bullied.*

School	Mean Rank	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
Urban	281.17	Urban	Rural	-.518	.242	.082
			Suburban	.085	.182	.886
Suburban	270.54	Suburban	Rural	-.604	.178	.002*
			Urban	-.085	.182	.886
Rural	336.92	Rural	Urban	.518	.242	.082
			Suburban	.604	.178	.002*

Note. Results from the Kruskal-Wallis yielded significant differences among the three schools ( $p = .003$ ).

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The second question of the survey asked students how often they had been physically bullied in the past two months. Respondents were given several options: *Never*, *Once*, *Two to three times*, *About once a week*, and *Several times a week*. These responses were each given a value ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*Several times a week*). Of the 70 respondents from the urban school, 43 answered *Never*; 11 answered *Once*; 6 answered *Two to three times*; 3 answered *About once a week*; and 7 answered *Several times a week*. Of the 419 respondents from the suburban school, 264 answered *Never*; 84 answered *Once*; 22 answered *Two to three times*; 34 answered *About once a week*; and 15 answered *Several times a week*. Of the 74 respondents from the rural school, 28 answered *Never*; 17 answered *Once*; 11 answered *Two to three times*;

12 answered *About once a week*; and 6 answered *Several times a week* (see Table 4). The Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the three schools. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference among the three schools ( $p = .000$ ). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the respondents at rural school was significantly higher than respondents at both the urban school and the suburban school ( $p = .43$  and  $p = .000$ , respectively) (see Table 5).

The third question asked about where the bullying takes place. The question required the respondents to check all of the responses that applied to him/her. The 70 respondents from the urban school checked 95 boxes, 32 of which responded *Never happened*. The results of the 63 remaining checked boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place in the *Hallways* with 29 responses, followed by the *Classroom* with 18, the *Lunchroom* with 9, the *Bathroom* with 4, the *School bus* with 2, *On the way home* with 1, and the *Playground* with 0. The suburban school had 419 respondents who checked 640 boxes. Of those responses, 172 checked *Never happened*. The results of the remaining 463 checked boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place in the *Hallways* with 187, followed by the *Classroom* with 108, the *Lunchroom* with 72, the *Playground* with 38, the *School bus* with 27, *On the way home* with 23, and the *Bathroom* with 13. The 74 respondents from the rural school checked 136 boxes, 16 of which responded *Never happened*. The results of the remaining 120 checked boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place in the *Hallways* with 41, followed by the *Lunchroom* with 26, the *Classroom* with 24, the *School bus* with 13, the *Playground* with 9, *On the way home* with 6, and the *Bathroom* with 1 (see Table 6).

Table 4

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked how often they were physically bullied in the last two months.*

Responses	Urban n = 70	School	
		Suburban n = 419	Rural n = 74
Never	61.4%	63.0%	37.8%
Once	15.7%	20.0%	23.0%
2-3 Times	8.6%	5.3%	14.9%
About once a week	4.3%	8.1%	16.2%
Several times a week	10.0%	3.6%	8.1%

Table 5

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning how often they had been physically bullied.*

School	Mean Rank	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
Urban	282.55	Urban	Rural	-.481	.200	.043*
			Suburban	.160	.151	.540
Suburban	269.31	Suburban	Rural	-.640	.147	.000*
			Urban	-.160	.151	.540
Rural	349.53	Rural	Urban	.481	.200	.043*
			Suburban	.640	.147	.000*

Note. Results from the Kruskal-Wallis yielded significant differences among the three schools ( $p = .000$ ).

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked where they were bullied.*

Responses	Urban n = 95	School	
		Suburban n = 640	Rural n = 136
School bus	2.1%	4.2%	9.6%
Classroom	19.0%	16.9%	17.7%
Bathroom	4.2%	2.0%	0.7%
Playground	0.0%	5.9%	6.6%
Hallways	30.5%	29.2%	30.2%
Lunchroom	9.5%	11.3%	19.1%
On the way home	1.1%	3.6%	4.4%
Never happened	33.7%	26.9%	11.8%

Further analysis indicates there were statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for the *Never happened* response and for the following locations: *School bus*, *Playground*, and *Lunchroom*. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the number of respondents from the urban school and suburban school who checked the *Never happened* box was significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school ( $p = .009$  and  $p = .001$ , respectively). The mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school who checked the *School Bus* box was significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from both the suburban school and the urban school ( $p = .008$  and  $p = .003$ ). The mean scores for the number of respondents from the rural school and the suburban school who checked the *Playground* box were significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the urban school ( $p = .018$  and  $p = .041$ , respectively). The mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school who checked the *Lunchroom* box was significantly higher than the mean

scores for the number of respondents from the urban school and the suburban school ( $p = .002$  and  $p = .004$ , respectively) (see Table 7).

The fourth question asks about when the bullying takes place. The question required the respondents to check all of the responses that applied to him/her. The 70 respondents from the urban school checked 164 boxes, 30 of which responded *Never happened*. The results of the 134 remaining checked boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place *After school* with 70, followed by *During class* with 26, *Between classes* with 18, *During lunch* with 14, and *Before school* with 6. The suburban school had 419 respondents who checked 630 boxes. Of those responses, 170 checked *Never happened*. The results of the remaining 460 checked boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place *Between classes* with 144, followed by *During lunch* with 110, *During class* with 106, *After school* with 53, and *Before school* with 47. The rural school had 74 respondents who checked 137 boxes. Of those responses, 15 checked *Never happened*. The results of the remaining 122 boxes indicate most of the bullying takes place *Between classes* with 40, followed by *During lunch* with 26, *During class* with 24, *After school* with 17 and *Before school* with 15 (see Table 8).

Further analysis indicates there are statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for the *Never happened* response and *Between classes*. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for the number of respondents from the urban school and the suburban school who checked the *Never happened* box are significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school ( $p = .016$  and  $p = .001$ , respectively). The mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school who checked the *Between classes* is significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the suburban school ( $p = .009$ ) (see Table 9).

Table 7

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning where they were bullied.*

Responses	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
School bus	Urban	Rural	-.147	.045	.003*
		Suburban	-.047	.034	.351
	Suburban	Rural	-.100	.033	.008*
		Urban	.047	.034	.351
	Rural	Urban	.147	.045	.003*
		Suburban	.100	.033	.008*
Playground	Urban	Rural	-.122	.045	.018*
		Suburban	-.082	.034	.444
	Suburban	Rural	-.040	.033	.444
		Urban	.082	.034	.041*
	Rural	Urban	.122	.045	.018*
		Suburban	.040	.033	.444
Lunchroom	Urban	Rural	-.223	.067	.002*
		Suburban	-.065	.050	.398
	Suburban	Rural	-.158	.049	.004*
		Urban	.065	.050	.398
	Rural	Urban	.223	.067	.002*
		Suburban	.158	.049	.004*
Never happened	Urban	Rural	.241	.082	.009*
		Suburban	.029	.061	.885
	Suburban	Rural	.212	.060	.001*
		Urban	-.029	.061	.885
	Rural	Urban	-.241	.082	.009*
		Suburban	-.212	.061	.001*

Note. The following locations did not yield significant results on the Chi-Square test and were therefore not included: classroom, bathroom, hallways, and on the way home.

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked when they were bullied.*

Responses	Urban n = 164	School	
		Suburban n = 630	Rural n = 137
Before school	3.7%	7.5%	11.0%
In between classes	11.0%	22.8%	29.2%
During class	15.9%	16.8%	17.5%
During lunch	8.5%	17.5%	19.0%
After school	42.7%	8.4%	12.2%
Never happened	18.3%	27.0%	11.0%

Table 9

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning when they were bullied.*

Responses	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
Between classes	Urban	Rural	-.169	.081	.091
		Suburban	.007	.061	.993
	Suburban	Rural	-.176	.059	.009*
		Urban	-.007	.061	.993
	Rural	Urban	.169	.081	.091
		Suburban	.176	.059	.009*
Never happened	Urban	Rural	.226	.081	.016*
		Suburban	.000	.061	.001*
	Suburban	Rural	.225	.060	.001*
		Urban	.000	.061	1.000
	Rural	Urban	-.226	.081	.016*
		Suburban	-.225	.060	.001*

Note. The following locations did not yield significant results on the Chi-Square test and were therefore not included: before school, during classes, during lunch, and after school.

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**Reporting trends.** The fifth question asked, “When this [bullying] happened to YOU, who did you report to?” The question required the respondents to check all of the responses that applied to him/her. The 70 respondents from the urban school checked 78 boxes, 30 of which were *Never Happened*. The remaining 48 consist of *No one* with 26, *Friend* with 10, *Parent* with 7, *Teacher* with 4, and *Office* with 1. The suburban school had 419 respondents who checked 482 boxes. Of those responses, 171 of which were *Never Happened*. The remaining 311 consist of *No one* with 145, *Friend* with 70, *Parent* with 59, the *Office* with 23, and *Teacher* with 14. The rural school had 74 respondents who checked 95 boxes, 16 of which were *Never Happened*. The remaining 79 consist of *No one* with 36, *Friend* with 18, *Parent* with 12, *Teacher* with 9, and the *Office* with 4 (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked who they reported to when they were bullied.*

Responses	Urban n = 78	School	
		Suburban n = 482	Rural n = 95
Parent	9.0%	12.2%	12.6%
Friend/Student	12.8%	14.5%	19.0%
Teacher	5.1%	2.9%	9.5%
Office or Counselor	1.3%	4.8%	4.2%
I did not report	33.3%	30.1%	37.9%
Never happened	38.5%	35.5%	16.8%

Further analysis indicates there are statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for the *Teacher* and *Never happened* responses. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school who checked the *Teacher* box is significantly higher than the mean score for the

number of respondents from the suburban school ( $p = .001$ ). The Tukey HSD test also indicated that the mean scores for the number of respondents from the urban school and the suburban school who checked the *Never happened* boxes are significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school ( $p = .025$  and  $p = .001$ , respectively) (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning who they reported to when they were bullied.*

Responses	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
Teacher	Urban	Rural	-.064	.034	.137
		Suburban	.024	.025	.617
	Suburban	Rural	-.088	.025	.001*
		Urban	-.024	.025	.617
	Rural	Urban	.064	.034	.137
		Suburban	.088	.025	.001*
Never happened	Urban	Rural	.212	.081	.025*
		Suburban	.000	.061	1.000
	Suburban	Rural	.212	.060	.001*
		Urban	.000	.061	1.000
	Rural	Urban	-.212	.081	.025*
		Suburban	-.212	.060	.001*

Note. The following locations did not yield significant results on the Chi-Square test and were therefore not included: parent, friend/student, office or counselor, and I did not report.

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The eleventh question asked, “When you have seen someone else get bullied, who did you report to?” The question required the respondents to check all of the responses that applied to him/her. The 70 respondents from the urban school checked 79 boxes, 18 of which were *Never seen*. The remaining 61 consist of *No one* with 26, *Friend* with 15, *Teacher* with 9, *Parent* with 7, and *Office* with 4. The suburban school had 419 respondents who checked 546 boxes. Of those responses, 126 of which were *Never Seen*. The remaining 420 consist of *No one*

with 121, *Parent* with 96, *Friend* with 92, *Teacher* with 71, and the *Office* with 40. The rural school had 74 respondents who checked 109 boxes, 18 of which were *Never seen*. The remaining 91 consist of *No one* with 23, *Friend* with 25, *Teacher* with 21, *Parent* with 13, and the *Office* with 9 (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked who they reported to when they saw someone else being bullied.*

Responses	School		
	Urban n = 79	Suburban n = 546	Rural n = 110
Parent	8.9%	22.9%	11.9%
Friend/Student	19.0%	22.0%	22.9%
Teacher	11.4%	16.9%	19.3%
Office or Counselor	5.1%	9.5	8.3%
I did not report	32.9%	28.9%	21.1%
Never seen	22.8%	30.1%	16.5%

Further analysis indicates there are statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for the *Teacher* responses. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the number of respondents from the rural school who checked the *Teacher* box is significantly higher than both the mean score for the number of respondents from the suburban school and the urban school ( $p = .022$  and  $p = .035$ , respectively). Although further analysis indicates that there are significant differences in the responses among the three schools for the *Parent* responses, post hoc comparisons could not be used to determine where those differences lie. The standardized residual indicates that the number of individuals who responded *Yes* for this response is lower than expected for the urban school ( $R = -1.9$ ,  $p = .041$ ) (see Table 13).

Table 13

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning who they reported to when they saw someone else being bullied.*

Responses	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>P</i>
Teacher	Urban	Rural	-.155	.062	.035*
		Suburban	-.033	.047	.759
	Suburban	Rural	-.122	.046	.022*
		Urban	.033	.047	.759
	Rural	Urban	.155	.062	.035*
		Suburban	.122	.046	.022*

Note. The following locations did not yield significant results on the Chi-Square test and were therefore not included: friend/student, office or counselor, I did not report, and never seen. The parent response yielded significant results on the Chi-Square, but not on the Tukey test; however, standardized residual indicates the number of individuals who responded *Yes* for this response is lower than expected for the urban school ( $R = -1.9$ )

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**Reporting preferences.** The seventh question asked, “Would you have reported if it was anonymous?” The respondents answered either *Yes*, *No*, or *I reported*. Sixty-nine of the 70 respondents from the urban school answered this question. Of those 69 respondents, 33 responded with *Yes*, 36 responded with *No*, and 0 responded *I reported*. Of the 419 respondents from the suburban school, 246 responded with *Yes*, 136 responded with *No*, 34 responded *I reported*, and 3 did not respond. Of the 74 respondents from the rural school, 45 responded with *Yes*, 22 responded with *No*, and 7 responded *I reported* (see Table 14). The comparative analysis, using the Chi-Square test indicated there were significant differences among the three schools ( $p = .005$ ); however, further analysis using the ANOVA and post hoc Tukey HSD tests did not yield any significant results. The standardized residuals for this question indicate that the number of students who reported *No* for the urban school was significantly higher than what was

expected, and the number of students who responded *I reported* was significantly lower than what was expected ( $R = 2.5, p < .05$ ; and  $R = -2.2, p < .05$ , respectively).

Table 14

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked if they would report if it was anonymous.*

Responses	School		
	Urban n = 69	Suburban n = 416	Rural n = 74
Yes	47.8%	58.7%	60.8%
No	52.5%	32.5%	29.7%
I reported	0.0%	8.1%	9.5%

The eighth question asked, “How would you prefer to report problems?” The respondents answered either *Website* or *Phone call/hot line*. Sixty-nine of the 70 respondents from the urban school answered this question. Of those 69 respondents, 32 responded with *Website*, 33 responded with *Phone call/hot line*, and 4 did not respond. Of the 419 respondents from the suburban school 340 responded with *Website*, 65 responded with *Phone call/hot line*, and 14 did not respond. Of the 74 respondents from the rural school, 52 responded with *Website*, 20 responded with *Phone call/hot line*, and 2 did not respond (see Table 15). Further analysis indicates there are statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for this question ( $p = .000$ ). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the number of respondents from the urban school is significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the suburban school and the rural school ( $p = .003$  and  $p = .000$ , respectively) (see Table 16).

Table 15

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked who how they would prefer to report bullying.*

Responses	Urban n = 69	School	
		Suburban n = 419	Rural n = 74
Website	46.4%	81.1%	70.3%
Phone call/hot line	47.8%	15.5%	27.8%
Did not respond	5.8%	3.3%	2.7%

Table 16

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning how would prefer to report.*

School	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P
Urban	Urban	Rural	.222	.068	.003*
		Suburban	.329	.051	.000*
Suburban	Suburban	Rural	-.106	.049	.079
		Urban	-.329	.051	.000*
Rural	Rural	Urban	-.222	.068	.003*
		Suburban	.106	.049	.079

Note. Results from the Chi-Square yielded significant differences among the three schools ( $p = .000$ ).

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 17

*Frequencies of responses when students were asked if they would use the SchoolTipline website to anonymously report bullying incidents.*

Responses	Urban n = 58	School	
		Suburban n = 307	Rural n = 56
Yes	37.9%	67.4%	62.5%
No	62.1%	32.6%	37.5%

The ninth question asked, “Would you use this website to anonymously report bullying?” Fifty-eight of the 70 respondents from the urban school answered this question. Of those 58 respondents, 22 responded with *Yes*, and 36 responded with *No*. Three hundred seven of the 419 respondents from the suburban school answered this question. Of those respondents, 207 responded with *Yes*, and 100 responded with *No*. Fifty-six of the 74 respondents from the rural school answered this question. Of those 56 respondents, 35 responded with *Yes*, and 21 responded with *No* (see Table 17). Further analysis indicates there are statistically significant differences in the responses among the three schools for this question. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the number of respondents from the urban school is significantly higher than the mean score for the number of respondents from the suburban school and the rural school ( $p=0.002$  and  $p=0.020$ , respectively) (see Table 18).

Table 18

*Differences among the respondents of the three schools concerning if students would use the SchoolTipline website to anonymously report bullying incidents.*

School	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P
Urban	Urban	Rural	.246	.091	.020*
		Suburban	.232	.068	.002*
Suburban	Suburban	Rural	.013	.069	.979
		Urban	-.232	.068	.002*
Rural	Rural	Urban	-.246	.091	.020*
		Suburban	-.013	.069	.979

Note. Results from the Chi-Square yielded significant differences among the three schools ( $p = .000$ ).

\* Mean difference is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The ninth question also contains an open-ended response option, which allowed the respondent to explain why he/she would use the website to report bullying. Twelve respondents from the urban school explained why they would use the website. Six domains were identified from among the responses: *It provides anonymity* (25.0%); *I feel safe using it* (8.3%); *it is*

*helpful/it works* (50.0%); *I would use it if it was serious* (8.3%); *it's a cool website* (8.3%); and *no further reason was given* (16.6%). Similar domains were found among the 103 responses from the suburban school: *It provides anonymity* (29.1%); *I feel safe using it* (18.2%); *it is helpful/it works* (32.6%); *it is easy to use* (10.1%); *bullying needs to stop* (3.9%); *I would use it if it was serious* (4.3%); and *no further reason was given* (5.9%). Of the 21 reasons from the rural school respondents, five similar domains were identified: *It provides anonymity* (33.3%); *I feel safe using it* (4.8%); *it is helpful/it works* (52.4%); *it is easy to use* (4.8%); and *I would use it if it was serious* (4.8%).

Our study and results found these primary things: (a) over half of the students surveyed at each of the three schools reported being either verbally or physically bullied in the last two months; (b) bullying is more likely to occur in places and at times when there is less adult supervision; (c) only about one-third of the students surveyed reported bullying to anyone, and only about one-sixth reported to the school; and (d) there are significant differences among the three schools in terms of bullying trends, reporting trends, and reporting preferences.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the collected data for bullying trends, reporting trends, and reporting preferences from an urban, suburban, and rural school, as well as to see if there were any significant differences among the three schools. It was found that about half of the respondents reported being bullied, which often took place in areas and at times that have less adult supervision; and that there were significant differences among the respondents' results at the three schools. These results are discussed in greater detail in this section, along with limitations, future directions, and implications for practice.

## Findings

The research issues explored in this study add to the previous research regarding bullying, reporting trends and preferences regarding traditional and non-traditional methods, and comparison analyses of urban, suburban, and rural schools. First, responses were analyzed to identify bullying trends concerning the prevalence rates of verbal and physical bullying, as well as where and when bullying occurs in the schools. Second, responses were analyzed to identify who they report to when they either are the victims or bullying, or have seen someone else get bullied. In addition, responses were analyzed to determine how students would prefer to report bullying incidents using non-traditional methods. Lastly, each question was also analyzed to determine where significant differences lie among the three schools, indicating the need for further research in this area.

**Bullying Trends.** The first four questions were regarding how often students were verbally and physically abused, as well as where and when the bullying occurred. The results from the survey indicate that over half of the students surveyed at each school had been verbally bullied in the last two months. Likewise, the results from the survey also indicate that a little

over a third of the students surveyed at the urban and suburban school were physically bullied, while almost two-thirds of the students surveyed at the rural reported being physically bullied in two months. Further analysis has shown that the rural school has significantly more verbal and physical bullying than both the suburban and rural schools. Although there have been little to no research comparing bullying trends based on geographic location, these results align with previous research indicating that students at rural schools engage in more at-risk behaviors, such as tobacco and alcohol use, and bringing a weapon to school (Atay & Spencer, 2002).

In regards to where the bullying occurs, all three schools reported that a majority of the bullying occurred in the hallways. The results also indicate that much of the bullying occurred in the classrooms and the lunchrooms. More students from the rural school also reported bullying on the school bus and in the lunchroom than the suburban and urban schools. These results corroborate earlier research which states that bullying often takes place in common areas where school personnel claims less “ownership” (Olweus, 1993; Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004).

Results from the survey indicated that students from the schools reported that much of the bullying takes place after school, in between classes, and during lunch, consistent with research stating that bullying often occurs when areas are highly frequented (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001). The results also showed that the students at the rural school reported more bullying between classes than the suburban school.

**Reporting Trends.** Since many of the students experience or observe bullying in the schools, part of the research looked at to whom the students reported these incidents. Two questions related to reporting preferences. Responses to the question related to whom they reported to when they were bullied indicated that of those that did report, only less than 15% of the students at the three schools reported bullying to the school when it happened, and about one-

third of the students surveyed at each school never reported the incidents to anyone. Further analysis showed that more students at the rural school reported to a teacher than students at the suburban school, and more students at the suburban and the urban schools reported that they did not report because they were never bullied.

When the students were asked to whom they reported when they saw someone else get bullied, the percentage of students who reported to the school rose from about 15% when reporting their own incident of bullying to approximately 25% when reporting seeing someone else get bullied. Once again, 20-30% of the students at each school never reported the incidents to anyone. Further analysis also showed that more students at the rural school reported to a teacher than the students at the suburban or urban school. These percentages of non-reporting corroborate previous research (Batsche & Knoff, 1993; Oliver, 1994).

**Reporting Preferences.** When asked if the students would report if it were anonymous, the percentages of students who stated that they would report varied from about 50% to almost 70%, with the rural school responding with the highest prevalence of reporting, although there were no significant differences among the three schools. When comparing non-traditional methods of reporting, the urban school did not have a clear preference between the website and a hot line, although the suburban and rural schools clearly preferred a website to a hot line to report incidents of bullying.

Likewise, only about 1/3 of the students at the urban school stated that they would use the website, whereas about 2/3 the student at the suburban and rural schools stated that they would use the website to anonymously report bullying. The most prevalent reasons students gave for using the website include a feeling of anonymity and safety, as well as believing it may be effective in stopping bullying and providing consequences for those who do bully. Even though

there is not a lot of previous research to compare the use of non-traditional methods of reporting, these results indicate that these methods promote reporting of bullying incidents because students believe that the website overcomes many of the identified barriers to reporting (Batsche & Knoff, 1993; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Stone & Isaacs, 2002).

### **Limitations**

Although some differences were found among the three schools in terms of bullying trends and reporting preferences, there are a few limitations which may affect the validity of these findings. One limitation was that the questions addressing where/when bullying occurred, and who they reported to were *check all that apply*. Since the students could not respond by clicking *Yes* or *No* for each variable, a checked option was coded as *Yes*, and the absence of a checked option was coded as *No*, when coding the responses into SPSS. This may be a limitation because a student may have left a box unchecked because of skipping the question, or checking the box twice. One way to minimize this possible error would be to require the student to answer either *Yes* or *No* for each option.

Another limitation is the convenient sample of the three schools. Incentives to participate in the study were provided by the schools. The rural and urban schools offered a piece of candy to participate, whereas the suburban school used the survey as either an English assignment or extra credit. The difference of the incentives led to a difference in sample size, as well as a possible difference in the demographics of the school populations. Despite this difference, the sample sizes were still considered robust enough to analyze the data.

Although a lot of research has been done on the topic of bullying, minimal research has been conducted on comparing trends among urban, suburban, and rural schools; and very little research has been done comparing bullying trends and reporting preferences among the three

schools. Again, the intent of this study was to explore what differences, if any, exist between one urban, suburban, and rural school. Due to the relatively low sample size of students and schools, it is difficult to determine with certainty that these differences are due to the geographic location, and not to other circumstances unique to those schools. These results may be supported through further research to determine if the results are generalizable.

### **Future Directions**

Several improvements to this study should be made if future researchers would like to expound on this study through replication or adaptation. Using the existing data, this study only focused on the survey questions directly related to the research questions. Data analysis was not conducted on the questions related to what stopped a student from reporting. As the literature has shown, identifying and addressing the barriers of student reporting is necessary to increase a student's likelihood of reporting, and thereby, increasing the amount of reporting of past and future incidents of bullying.

This study was exploratory in nature because of the lack of research that had been done comparing bullying trends and reporting preferences based on geography (i.e. urban, suburban, rural). These geographic areas were only represented by one school each, limiting its generalizability. Another factor that limited the generalizability was the differences in incentives for participants. Further research may consider using a larger sample size from several schools to represent each geographic locale, as well as providing a uniform incentive to rule out possible extraneous factors.

While this study targeted middle school and junior students from 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, further research may also want to compare these responses and trends with students of different populations, such as elementary schools or high schools. Further research may also be

conducted with the existing data to determine if there were any significant differences of the responses based on gender, grade, or ethnicity. Another area that could be explored is the different kinds of bullying, such as cyber bullying, and homophobic bullying.

Since the use of a website to anonymously report incident of bullying and to collect information via surveys are meant to increase communication between administration and students, as well as the amount of reporting, it may be beneficial to do a follow-up study on one or more of these schools to determine if this website has been effective in completing one or both of these goals. Other studies may also have the students take a school climate survey to see if use of this website improves the school climate over time. This may be beneficial since improving school climate has been viewed as a common factor for effective anti-bullying programs (Perone, 1998).

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this exploratory study provide some insight into what things to keep in mind when creating/implementing programs to combat bullying in a middle school or junior high school. As mentioned before, there is quite a lot of information on traditional methods of reporting bullying, but not as much research on non-traditional methods. Likewise, there is a plethora of studies on the effects of bullying and bullying trends in the secondary school setting, but very little research comparing these trends based on geographic locale (urban, suburban, or rural). This study supports previous research which states that this is a variable that has an impact on the schools, creating definite changes among them, and which should be addressed (Lorion, 1998; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

Research has shown that negative short-term and long-term effects of bullying can negatively impact a student's willingness to attend school and participate in activities, as well as

putting that student at higher risk for many mental health and behavior problems. Since bullying negatively impacts so many students, especially in the middle schools and junior high schools, it is not a surprise that so much time and effort is used to combat this problem. Therefore, it is important to identify and overcome students' perceived barriers when implementing anti-bullying programs, in order to increase student buy-in. Some of the biggest barriers include a fear of retaliation if they reported, and the feeling that the administration won't do anything to intervene (Batsche & Knoff, 1993; Oliver 1994).

We live in a world where technology, such as cell phones and the internet, are common uses of communication, yet many schools do not take advantage of these forms to increase communication in their schools. The minimal research that has been done on these non-traditional methods of reporting bullying incidents indicate that providing a phone hotline or texting service may provide a certain degree of anonymity and increased availability, but may still be limited, due to the resources needed on the administration's side to read the reports and respond.

SchoolTipline was chosen for this study because of the features it provides on its website to overcome these students' perceived barriers. It allows the students to report incidents of bullying to the school from any computer, 24 hours a day, keep track of the status of the report, and provides anonymous two-way communication between the student and administrator. In addition, the website also allows the administration to create surveys or use provided surveys to help them learn from the students what is happening in the school and what issues the students feel is important to address. This feature was intended to increase communication and help the administration know what is going on with the school, as well as encourage the students to take

ownership of their school. The focus group at Dixon Middle School indicated that the students perceived this website as a convenient and effective way of reporting incidents of bullying.

Likewise, the results of this study indicates that the students surveyed at the urban, suburban, and rural schools would be likely to use this website to report bullying because they felt this website provides anonymity and safety, and is perceived as a way to combat bullying and let the administrators know what is going on in the school. It is also important to know that not everyone preferred the website to report incidents. About an equal number of surveyed students at the urban school preferred a phone call/hotline to using the website. If students do not own a computer or have the internet at home, they may not view the website as a convenient way of reporting.

Perceived effectiveness does not always mean actual effectiveness. It is important to note that the website should not be the sole method used to combat bullying, but rather as a method of increasing the effectiveness of an implemented anti-bullying program. In addition, both the students and the faculty should be made aware of and trained on how to effectively report and respond to reports of bullying incidents, as well as when a report is warranted. Students should also be given opportunities and access to computers in order to report.

There are additional differences among the three schools in terms of bullying trends and reporting preferences. Students at the rural school reported more bullying within the two months prior to the survey, and although there were many shared locations and times in which the bullying occurred, there were still significant differences. These significant differences indicate that programs that are effective for a suburban school may not be effective in a rural school. Therefore, it is important for the administration to determine when and where to increase supervision and implement other strategies to combat bullying. These differences also indicate

that more research is needed to determine if these differences lie just among these three schools, or if there are actual differences among urban, suburban, and rural schools.

## **Conclusion**

In review, bullying is an issue that is prevalent in schools, especially in the middle schools and junior high schools. Bullying has many short-term and long-term negative effects for the bully, target, and school in general (Nansel et al., 2004). One of the biggest barriers to combating bullying is that the administrators don't know where and when it is happening or going to happen, and the students who do know are not reporting it (O'Moore & Minton, 2005). Many traditional methods of reporting, consisting of verbal or written reports, have not been effective in helping the administration become aware of bullying incidents and intervening. In fact, many students choose not to report bullying incidents, or only report to family and friends instead of school personnel. Some schools are looking into non-traditional methods of reporting, although more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of these methods.

Although much research has been done on bullying trends and reporting preferences, very little research has been done on comparing schools based on geographic locales (urban, suburban, and rural). This has important implications for the generalizability of the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs, as well as the generalizability of bullying studies aimed at one demographic. The results of this study indicate while the bullying trends of prevalence rates and when/where bullying is occurring support many of the previous studies, there are also significant differences among the three schools in terms of bullying trends and reporting preferences. This study, however, is exploratory in nature, and the results should be viewed with caution, due to the small number of schools who participated. This study does support previous research that geographic locale is an important variable that should be further researched.

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*Appendix A: Geographic Definitions*

Definitions taken from United States Department of Education, 2007, Local codes section, para. 11-16, 20-22.

Distant rural area: “census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.”

Fringe rural area: “census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.”

Large city: “territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.” Small suburb: “Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.”

Large suburb: “Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.”

Midsized city: “territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.”

Midsized suburb: “Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.”

Remote rural area: “census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.”

Small city: “territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.”

*Appendix B: Survey***Online Bullying Survey**

1. At school, how often have YOU been teased, made fun of, taunted, gossiped about, (verbally bullied) by the same person in the past two months?
  - Once
  - Two to three times
  - About a once a week
  - Several times a week
  - Never
  
2. At school, how often have YOU been kicked, hit, shoved, tripped, (physically bullied) by the same person in the past two months?
  - Once
  - Two to three times
  - About once a week
  - Several times a week
  - Never
  
3. WHERE did these things (from questions 1 and 2) happen to YOU? (Select all that apply)
  - school bus
  - classroom
  - bathroom
  - playground/football or other playing field
  - hallways
  - lunch room/cafeteria/commons
  - on the way home from school
  - never happened
  
4. WHEN did these things (from questions 1 and 2) happen to YOU? (select all that apply)
  - Before school
  - In between classes
  - During class
  - During lunch
  - After school
  - Never happened

5. When this happened to YOU, who did you report to? (select all that apply)
- Parent
  - Friend/Student
  - Teacher
  - Office or Counselor
  - I did not report to anyone
  - Never happened
6. What stopped you from reporting bullying or other problems, when it happens to you? (select all that apply)
- Don't feel comfortable telling someone
  - Fear of other students knowing you reported
  - Too embarrassed to reveal the details
  - Did not know it required reporting
  - I reported
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Would you have reported if it was anonymous?
- Yes
  - No
  - I reported
8. How would you prefer to report problems?
- Anonymous website
  - Anonymous phone call/hot line
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
9. Would you use this website to anonymously report bullying?
- Yes
  - No
  - Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Would you still use this website to anonymously report, if you had to login with a username and password?
- Yes
  - No
  - Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

11. When you have seen someone else get bullied, who did you report to? (select all that apply)

- Parent
- Friend/Student
- Teacher
- Office or Counselor
- I did not report to anyone
- Never seen

12. What stopped you from reporting after seeing someone else get bullied? (select all that apply)

- Don't feel comfortable telling someone
- Fear of other students knowing you reported
- Too embarrassed to reveal the details
- Did not know it required reporting
- I reported
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. What are the most important things schools can do to help stop bullying? (select all that apply)

- Making rules against bullying
- Enforcing rules against bullying and punishing bullies
- Teaching kids how to get along better
- Supervising the playground and halls better
- Have an anonymous website for reporting
- Have an anonymous phone line for reporting

14. Gender

- Male
- Female

15. Grade

- 4<sup>th</sup>
- 5<sup>th</sup>
- 6<sup>th</sup>
- 7<sup>th</sup>
- 8<sup>th</sup>
- 9<sup>th</sup>
- 10<sup>th</sup>
- 11<sup>th</sup>

- 12<sup>th</sup>

#### 16. Ethnicity

- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- African American
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix C: Survey in Spanish***Encuesta sobre Acoso en tu escuela**

1. En tu escuela, que tan seguido se han burlado o han dicho rumores de ti (acoso verbal) por la misma persona?
  - Una vez
  - Dos o tres veces
  - Una vez por semana
  - Muchas veces a la semana
  - Nunca
  
2. En tu escuela, que tan seguido te han pateado, pegado, empujado (acoso físico) por la misma persona en los últimos dos meses?
  - Una vez
  - Dos o tres veces
  - Una vez por semana
  - Muchas veces a la semana
  - Nunca
  
3. DONDE ocurrieron estos problemas (de las preguntas 1 y 2). Selecciona las opciones que se aplican a tu respuesta.
  - Bus escolar
  - Salón de clases
  - Parque/ campo de football u otro lugar de juego
  - Estacionamiento (parqueador)
  - Baños
  - Pasillos
  - Cafeteria
  - En camino a mi casa
  - Nunca me ha ocurrido
  
4. CUANDO ocurrieron estos problemas (de las preguntas 1 y 2). Selecciona las opciones que se aplican a tu respuesta.
  - Antes de la escuela
  - Entre medio de las clases
  - Durante las clases
  - Durante el almuerzo
  - Después de las escuela
  - Nunca me ha ocurrido

5. Cuando estos problemas te ocurrieron a ti, a quien le reportaste? (Selecciona las opciones que se apliquen a tu respuesta)
- A un amigo/otro estudiante
  - A un maestro(a)
  - A la oficina o a un consejero
  - No le reporte a nadie
  - Nunca me ha ocurrido
6. Después que te acosaron, que fue lo que te paro de reportar a alguien el problema? (Selecciona las opciones que se apliquen a tu respuesta)
- No me sentí cómoda(a) de decirle a alguien
  - Miedo o temor de que otros estudiantes supieran que reportaste
  - Me dio verguenza de mencionar los detalles del problema
  - No sabía que había que reportar
  - Si reporte el problema
  - Otro \_\_\_\_\_
7. Si el reporte hubiese sido anónimo, lo hubieses reportado?
- Si
  - No
  - Lo reporte
8. Como preferirías reportar problemas que ocurren en tu escuela?
- Página web anónima
  - Línea telefónica anónima
  - Otro \_\_\_\_\_
9. Usarías esta página web para reportar de forma anónima que has sido acosado?
- Si
  - No
  - Porque o porque no? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Usarías esta página web para reportar de forma anónima si tuvieras una identificación de Registro (login) y una contraseña?
- Si
  - No
  - Porque o porque no? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Cuando has visto a otra persona ser acosado(a), a quien le reportaste? (Selecciona las opciones que se apliquen)

- A un padre/madre
- A un amigo(a)/estudiante
- A una maestro(a)
- A la oficina o Consejero escolar Officer
- No le reporte el problema a nadie
- No he visto a otra persona ser acosado(a)

12. Que te paro de haber reportado despues de haber visto a otra persona ser acosado? (Selecciona las opciones que se apliquena tu respuesta)

- No me sentí cómoda(a) de decirle a alguien
- Miedo o temor de que otros estudiantes supieran que tu reportaste
- Me dio verguenza mencionar los detalles del problema
- No sabía que había que reportar
- Si reporte el problema
- Otro \_\_\_\_\_

13. Que consideras que es lo mas importante que puede hacer TU escuela para parar el acoso? (Selecciona las opciones que se apliquen a tu respuesta)

- Crear reglas en contra del acoso
- Imponer reglas en contra del acoso y castigar a los acosadores
- Enseñar a los estudiantes como llevarsela mejor
- Supervisar mejor los pasillos y parques de la escuela
- Tener una página web anónima para reportar
- Tener una línea telefónica para reportar

14. Cual es tu sexo?

- Masculino
- Femenino

15. En que grado estás?

- 4<sup>to</sup>
- 5<sup>to</sup>
- 6<sup>to</sup>
- 7<sup>mo</sup>
- 8<sup>vo</sup>
- 9<sup>no</sup>
- 10<sup>mo</sup>
- 11

12

16. Cual es tu raza?

- Anglo- Americano/ Blanco(a)
- Hispano(a)
- Asiatico(a)
- Islas Pacíficas
- Nativ Americano or Nativo de Alaska
- Africano Americano(a)
- Otro \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix D: Survey Instructions*



**Taking the Survey**

1. Go to [www.schooltipline.com](http://www.schooltipline.com)
  2. In the top right hand corner, you will see a box that says “Type to select a school.” Type in \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High
  3. Click on “continue”
  4. Click on “Take a Survey” (2<sup>nd</sup> option)
  5. Check and accept the “terms of use” by clicking both boxes in the yellow section at the top of the page.
  6. Click on “Safe Schools Survey”
  7. Fill out the 16 question survey
  8. Click on “Submit”
- Thank you for your help 😊



### **Reliability Survey – DAY 1**

1. Go to [www.schooltipline.com](http://www.schooltipline.com)
2. In the top right hand corner, you will see a box that says “Type to select a school.” Type in \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High
3. Click on “continue”
4. Click on “Take a comparative Survey” (3<sup>rd</sup> option)
5. It will come up with the prompt “is this your first time taking the survey”? Click on “**YES**”
6. Type in your **first and last name**.
7. Click on the double arrow button
8. Check and accept the “terms of use” by clicking the box in the yellow section at the top of the page.
9. Click on “Safe Schools Survey”
10. Fill out the 16 question survey and then hit “Submit”
11. A screen will pop up with the Case ID. Don’t worry about saving the Case ID’s.  
Thank you for your help 😊



### **Reliability Survey – DAY 2**

1. Go to [www.schooltipline.com](http://www.schooltipline.com)
2. In the top right hand corner, you will see a box that says “Type to select a school.” Type in \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High
3. Click on “continue”
4. Click on “Take a comparative Survey” (3<sup>rd</sup> option)
5. It will come up with the prompt “is this your first time taking the survey”? Click on “**NO**”
6. Type in your **CASE ID**.
7. Click on the double arrow button
8. Check and accept the “terms of use” by clicking the box in the yellow section at the top of the page.
9. Click on “Safe Schools Survey”
10. Fill out the 16 question survey and then hit “Submit”
11. A screen will pop up with the Case ID. Don’t worry about saving the Case ID’s.  
Thank you for your help 😊