

# Differences in Bullying Victimization Between Students With and Without Disabilities

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## Our Goal

Our poster is intended to provide information about the importance of examining differences in bullying victimization of students with disabilities. While some studies have examined bully victimization experienced by students with disabilities and those without, few have investigated how bully victimization differs between various disability categories compared to students without disabilities. By understanding differences, we can better focus our intervention efforts.

## Previous Research

- Students with disabilities are generally more likely to be bullied than students without disabilities (Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009).
- However, the victimization rates for students with disabilities have greatly varied in past research – ranging from 0 to 100% (Rose et al., 2010).
- This range may be due to differences in victimization by type of disability, and not all types may be bullied more than students without disabilities.
- Few studies have examined bullying victimization rates for specific disabilities compared to students without disabilities, but research typically shows that students with emotional disturbance, autism spectrum disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder show higher rates of victimization than typically developing peers (Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012; Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Weiner & Mak, 2009).
- Certain behaviors may place students with particular disabilities at higher risk for being bullied, such as internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and social skills difficulties (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Farmer, et al., 2012; Perry, Kusel & Perry, 1988; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2013; Sabornie, 1994; Turner, et al., 2011; Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare, 1990; Nolan, Flynn, & Garber, 2003; Swearer et al., 2012).
- Previous studies have differed in their measures used to define and quantify bullying, which also may contribute to the wide range of victimization rates in past research (Rose et al., 2010).

## Method

- 12,402 participants (902 parents/guardians of students with disabilities and 11,500 parents/guardians of students without disabilities) from 74 elementary schools in Delaware
- Parent survey asked child's gender, grade, and parent's race/ethnicity. Parents were also asked to indicate if their child has a disability (and what type). Table 2 shows the number of participants per disability category.
- Bully victimization was assessed with a modified version of the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument: Bully/Target Scale (B/T; Marsh et al., 2011). See Table 1.
- Bully victimization status was determined two ways:
  - First way: Responses of "never" on item 13 classified the student as a non-victim. Responses of "sometimes" or higher classified the student as a victim.
  - Second way: Responses of "never" or "sometimes" on item 13 classified the student as a non-victim. Responses of "once or twice a month" or higher classified the student as a victim.

Table 1

Modified Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument

Subscale	Item
Verbal Bullying	1. My child was teased by someone saying hurtful things to him/her.
	4. A student said mean things to my child.
	7. My child was called names he/she didn't like.
	10. Hurtful jokes were made up about my child.
Physical Bullying	2. My child was pushed or shoved on purpose.
	5. My child was hit or kicked and it hurt.
	8. A student stole or broke something of my child's on purpose.
	11. A student threatened to harm my child.
Social/Relational Bullying	3. Students left my child out of things to make him/her feel badly.
	6. A student told/got others not to like my child.
	9. A student got others to say mean things about my child.
General Item	13. My child was bullied in this school.

Note. Response choices for items included: "Never," "Sometimes," "Once or twice a month," "Once a week," "Several times a week," and "Everyday."

## Results: Odds Ratios

Table 2

Odds Ratios for Bullying Victimization by Disability Type

Disability	n	Odds Ratio	
		"Never" as Non-victim	"Never" and "Sometimes" as Non-victim
Specific Learning Disability	287	1.79**	1.19
Other Health Impairment (e.g. ADHD)	274	2.76**	1.23
Speech/Language Impairment	229	1.80*	1.7
Autism Spectrum Disorder	55	2.38**	2.0
Mild Intellectual Disability	18	2.98*	3.69
Hearing Impairment	16	3.94*	1.48
Emotional Disturbance	12	8.07**	10.09**

Note. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

- Odds ratios were calculated for each disability compared to students without disabilities. Table 2 shows odds ratios for the two ways of classifying victims.
- First classification method (victim status with response of "sometimes" or higher on item 13):
  - All disability types show a significantly increased likelihood of being bullied.
  - Students with emotional disturbance demonstrate much higher risk for bullying victimization. A student with emotional disturbance is around 8 times more likely to be bullied than a student without a disability.
- Second classification method (victim status with response of "once or twice a month" or higher on item 13):
  - Only students with emotional disturbance show increased risk of being victims of bullying. A student with emotional disturbance is approximately 10 times more likely to be bullied compared to a student without a disability.

## Results: Prevalence Rates

Percentage of parents responding "once or twice a month" or more:

"A student said mean things to my child." (Verbal)  
**50.0%** of students with **emotional disturbance**  
**20.0%** of students with a **hearing impairment**  
 COMPARED TO  
**10.2%** of students **without disabilities**

"My child was hit or kicked and it hurt." (Physical)  
**9.1%** of students with **emotional disturbance**  
**4.5%** of students with **other health impairment**  
 COMPARED TO  
**2.3%** of students **without disabilities**

"Students left my child out of things to make him/her feel badly." (Relational)  
**17.6%** of students with a **mild intellectual disability**  
**16.7%** of students with **emotional disturbance**  
**14.5%** of students with **autism spectrum disorder**  
 COMPARED TO  
**4.6%** of students **without disabilities**

"My child was bullied in this school." (General)  
**41.7%** of students with **emotional disturbance**  
**16.7%** of students with a **mild intellectual disability**  
 COMPARED TO  
**5.2%** of students **without disabilities**

## Discussion

- The methods used to determine bullying victimization status are important and create variation in victimization rates.
- Students with disabilities seem to be at greater risk of being bullied than students without disabilities. In particular, students with emotional disturbance appear to be at greatest risk.
- Examining item prevalence rates by disability category and type of bullying provides focus for intervention planning.
- School-wide interventions for all students need to focus on fostering positive school climate, emphasizing peer relations, and acceptance of differences.
- Increase awareness of the negative impact of verbal and relational bullying on others, not just physical bullying.
- Students with disabilities (especially those with emotional disturbance) should be targeted for bullying interventions such as additional opportunities for social skill development.