

## **Feasibility of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in Low-Income Schools**

JUN S. HONG

*School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,  
Urbana, Illinois, USA*

*This article examines school response to bullying and youth aggression in upper/middle-class and low socioeconomic neighborhoods, and the feasibility of successfully implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in schools located in impoverished communities. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is one of the few programs that has proven efficacy in upper/middle-class areas for reducing the incidence of bullying and improving attitudes towards school and academic achievement, but the effectiveness of the program has not been tested in low-income schools. However, research indicates that in both upper/middle-class and low socioeconomic neighborhoods, children are reluctant to seek assistance, and school teachers are not well-informed of effective bullying prevention measures. Researchers have pointed out that although children of low socioeconomic status (particularly minorities) have higher incidence of behavioral problems than their upper/middle-class counterparts, socioeconomic and cultural differences pose a major challenge to implementing effective anti-bullying interventions in schools that are located in impoverished communities. Suggestions for enhancing the applicability of anti-bullying programs to low-income schools are included.*

**KEYWORDS** *bullying, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, youth aggression, poverty, low-income schools*

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Address correspondence to Jun S. Hong, School of Social Work, University of Illinois, 1207 W. Oregon Street, Urbana, IL 61801, USA. E-mail: jhong23@uiuc.edu

In the wake of several recent school shootings, media reports about crimes committed by teenagers have heightened concerns about youth violence nationwide (Herrenkohl et al., 2001). As a result, school-based violence prevention policies, such as 'zero-tolerance,' were enacted in most school districts. The premise behind these policies is to prevent tragedies, such as Columbine, from reoccurring. School officials and researchers have examined major risk factors leading to tragic outcomes, and pointed out bullying as a major problem leading to school shootings (Roche & Bower, 2001). Indeed, school shootings suggest that many students unable to cope with peer victimization resort to violent acts (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003).

In response to the tragic outcomes of bullying and the increasing need for psycho-educational programs, bully prevention programs have been developed (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Researchers on anti-bullying programs have suggested a need for school officials' involvement in deterring bullying (Ballard, Argus, & Remley, 1999; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Newson-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). However, only a handful of anti-bullying programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Espelage & Swearer, 2003), have been empirically tested and proven to be effective in fostering pro-social behavior and reducing aggression and peer harassment. Although anti-bullying programs have been implemented in suburban school districts nationwide, the question remains: Are school-based bully prevention programs just as effective in school districts situated in poor areas? Few researchers have examined the prevalence of youth aggression and bullying in low-income schools (Zeldin, 2004). However, there has not been a systematic review of the efficacy of anti-bullying programs in schools located in poor communities.

This article contributes to evaluating the applicability of anti-bullying programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, to low-income school districts. I begin with a brief discussion of the prevalence of bullying in schools, which is followed by comparing school officials' response to bullying in upper/middle-class and low-income schools. I then describe the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and discuss its effectiveness and applicability in upper/middle-class and low-income schools (in communities with a high rate of poverty). Finally, suggestions for effective bullying intervention and prevention research in schools located in poor neighborhoods are offered.

## PREVALENCE OF BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

The prevalence of bullying is difficult to establish as the definition and measures used in studies vary tremendously (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). According to the Wellesley Centers for Women, although school violence has declined by 4% over the past few years, bullying has increased

by 5% since 1999. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institute of Health (NICHD) also reported that one out of four children has reported being victimized by their peers, and one out of five children has reported victimizing another child. About 29% of U.S. students from grade six to ten have been involved in bullying—as victims, perpetrators, or both (NICHD, 2001). Additionally, the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center found in a national survey that 13% of students in grade 6–10 have reported bullying another student, and 11% reported being victimized by their peers.

Although bullying has been operationalized in many ways (Bosworth et al., 1999), one common characteristic of bullying is a stronger, more aggressive individual inflicting physical or mental harm to a smaller and weaker individual (Atlas & Pepler, 2001; Ballard et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001). According to Pellegrini (2002), bullying is a form of aggression that persists over time and is characterized by a power imbalance. Smith et al. (2004) established that bullying is, “a particularly vicious kind of aggressive behavior distinguished by repeated acts against weaker victims who cannot easily defend themselves” (p. 547). Olweus identifies a bully as someone who, “chronically harasses someone else either physically or psychologically” (Bosworth et al., 1999). Bullying is not “a normal part of growing up.” It is as a major problem affecting the well-being and social functioning of children and adolescents in schools. It is a potentially serious threat to healthy development (Nansel et al., 2001), which leads to immediate and long-term consequences. Both bullies and victims have poorer psychological adjustment than individuals who are not involved in bullying (Smith et al., 2004). Children and adolescents who bully their peers are more likely than their non-bullying peers to consume alcohol and smoke, perform poorly in school, display a need for dominance, and show little empathy for their victims (Smith et al., 2004). Bullies are likely to grow up to become perpetrators of violence (e.g., domestic violence, child abuse) (Colvin et al., 1998). Bully victims typically are socially isolated, lack social skills, and suffer from anxiety and lower self-esteem than their peers (Smith et al. 2004; quoted in Olweus, 1997). Thus, school response to the problems of bullying and peer victimization is crucial, not only for ensuring school safety, but also for fostering pro-social attitude for healthy development.

#### SCHOOL OFFICIALS' RESPONSES TO BULLYING IN MIDDLE-CLASS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The growing recognition of bullying as a serious problem caused teachers and school officials to consider how school policy for ensuring safety can

be modified or expanded to address bullying (Limber & Small, 2003). Many state legislators have become interested in passing laws to influence the development of school-based violence prevention policies, which includes bullying. School officials are interested in learning how bullying prevention programs can be best implemented in schools (Limber & Small, 2003). When the goal is to ensure school safety for students, school intervention involves increasing supervision and sanctions for bullying and peer victimization (Colvin et al., 1998). Yet, schools in general do not adopt evidence-based interventions due to poor or limited resources, absence of teacher training and support, bureaucratic barriers, or a combination of these reasons (Cunningham & Henggeler, 2001).

How have students responded to bullying behavior? Elementary school children who experience interpersonal conflict with their peers (including bullying) are reluctant to seek assistance from their teachers (Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001). Help seeking is perceived by students as a way to avoid rather than resolve conflict. However, when children are pushed "far enough," they realize that they cannot resolve a conflict on their own, and teacher intervention may be necessary (Newman et al., 2001). Further, students reported feeling safe if they experienced positive student-teacher relationships. Thus, teachers' active response is necessary, although many teachers are not well-aware of their potential role in deterring bullying behavior.

Some teachers do not perceive bullying as a serious problem and consequently do not intervene (Atlas & Pepler, 2001; Pellegrini, 2002). As many as 40% of students in elementary school responded that teachers intervene in bullying situation only "once in a while or almost never" (Atlas & Pepler, 2001), which suggests that teachers have a tendency to overlook bullying. Pellegrini (2002) also indicated that teachers are likely to ignore bullying if physical and verbal aggressions are absent, such as ostracism or spreading rumors about a particular individual. In many cases, teachers commonly assume that students should be "able to take care of themselves."

Moreover, Atlas and Pepler (2001) also noted that many teachers do not know how to resolve conflicts since bullying is hidden from adults. As a result, it is difficult for adults to understand factors contributing to the bullying situation (Atlas & Pepler, 2001). Colvin (1998) argued that other school authorities have not been aware of the extent of bullying behavior. For example, school staff members who supervise playgrounds may need in-service training to distinguish playful fighting from aggressive fighting. Cunningham and Henggeler (2001) also argued that despite the need for evidence-based interventions, teachers receive information from the media, popular books, and newsletters concerning an array of strategies that address bullying with little or no empirical support. Additionally, teachers rarely examine these formidable barriers to information access for informing program choices (Cunningham & Henggeler, 2001).

## SCHOOL RESPONSE TO BULLYING BEHAVIOR IN LOW-INCOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Many studies on bullying and school violence prevention programs in general have not considered the difference between schools located in middle-class neighborhoods and those in inner-city neighborhoods. Researchers who examine the prevalence of bullying and aggressive behavior in impoverished neighborhoods have consistently found that children of low socioeconomic status have a higher incidence of behavior problems, compared to the upper or middle-class population (Cunningham & Henggeler, 2001; Qi & Kaiser, 2003; Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002). Qi and Kaiser (2003), for example, found that among preschool children, the prevalence of behavioral problems is estimated to be between 3% and 6% in the general population, whereas it is 30% among low-income areas. The majority of studies on bullying and aggression in low socioeconomic neighborhoods have identified major risk and protective factors of youth violence. However, few researchers on bullying and aggression in low-income, urban schools have examined teachers' response to violence. Juvonen et al. (2003) found that similar to teachers in suburban neighborhoods, teachers in impoverished schools also have an important role in intervening and preventing the occurrence of bullying. However, they receive little (if any) help or training in how to effectively handle such situations (Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006). Teachers in inner-city schools are also more reluctant to intervene when they witness bullying (Juvonen et al., 2003) than teachers in suburban schools due to a low level of confidence (Walter et al., 2006).

What are some differences between the responses to school yard bullying in suburban neighborhood versus those in urban, inner-city areas? In their study of adolescents in a low-income urban community in South Bronx, Freudenberg et al. (1997) noted that most youth violence interventions in this community involve punitive, "hard" approaches, which include police, stiffer sentences (for juveniles), and mandatory "curfews." They also found that adults and institutions failed to protect students from harm. Schools in the South Bronx taught conflict resolution skills, which did not address the magnitude of violence in young people's lives. Researchers noted that school authorities (as a risk mechanism) fail to provide requisite skills for avoiding violence and fail to engage youths, which lead to involvement in disruptive school behavior, such as bullying.

In their examination of social and physical aggression among at-risk adolescent girls in low-income urban areas, Talbott et al. (2002) also found that school interventions for behavioral problems, such as bullying, are often reactive rather than proactive, and interventions are typically in response to physical aggression and disobedience or disrespect. Students in inner-city neighborhoods were rated by their teachers as highly aggressive with significant deficits in academic and social skills (Atkins et al., 2002;

cited in Talbott et al., 2002; Zeldin, 2004). School officials respond to aggressive behavior, such as direct bullying and physical fights by suspension. Students from low-income African American families are at an increased risk of suspension (Talbott et al., 2002). In their study of teachers' beliefs about mental health service needs in six inner-city elementary schools located in the Midwest, Walter et al. (2006) pointed out the problems of teachers' lack of confidence about their ability to manage disruptive school behavior.

### OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM: A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

In response to problems associated with aggression and bullying in schools, many schools have implemented preventative programs or policies. Unfortunately, few studies have been evaluated and thus, little is known about the effectiveness of these programs (Cunningham & Henggeler, 2001; Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003). Several strategies have been used to address the problems of bullying and school violence and have been classified as *targeted* or *universal* (Orpinas et al., 2003). Targeted programs are designed for a subgroup of individuals at-risk of bullying or for those who have committed a violent act. The goal of targeted programs is to reduce risk factors and increase the protective factors (Orpinas et al., 2003). Universal programs, on the other hand, are designed to prevent or reduce violence by training the school or modifying the school environment. The goal of the program is to affect the entire school community (Orpinas et al., 2003).

Not much is known about factors that affect or predict differences in school-based bullying intervention or prevention programs or their efficacy (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Among 600 programs reviewed, the Blueprints for Violence Prevention, launched by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at the University of Colorado, has identified eleven major at-risk youth prevention and intervention programs, which met the strict scientific standards of efficacy (Blueprint for Violence Prevention, 2002–2004) and eighteen programs that have been identified as promising. The risk prevention and intervention programs are designed to address at-risk youth behaviors, including substance abuse, poor academic performance, behavioral/emotional problems, and bullying. Among the programs that are specifically dedicated to bullying prevention and intervention, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is one of few programs that has been identified as an evidence-based program (Blueprint for Violence Prevention, 2002–2004).

#### The Whole-School Approach

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was first implemented in 1983, after three 10- to 14-year-old boys in Norway committed suicide as a consequence

of bullying and victimization, which led to a nationwide campaign against bullying and youth aggression in Norwegian schools (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). The effectiveness of this program was evaluated in a research project, which involved 2,500 students (both boys and girls) in 42 elementary and junior high schools from 1983 to 1985 (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). After the implementation of the program, the results included: 50% or more reduction in students' reports of bullying and victimization; reduction in antisocial behaviors (e.g., vandalism, truancy); significant improvement of the "social climate" of the classroom (e.g., discipline); and more positive attitudes towards academics and the school (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). This program has been successfully replicated internationally and in the United States (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). This is a whole-school, multilevel approach for the reduction and prevention of bullying, in which school officials all have a hand in initiating bullying prevention (Blueprint for Violence Prevention, 2002–2004). This program targets several levels of school ecology—the individual, classroom, and school (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Additional intervention is designed to target students identified as bullies or victims (Blueprint for Violence Prevention, 2002–2004).

Smith et al. (2004) noted that the whole-school approach is predicated on the assumption that bullying and peer victimization are systemic problems, and intervention programs must be directed at the entire school rather than individual bullies or victims. The advantage of the whole-school approach is that it avoids the potential problem of stigmatizing either bullies or victims, and all members of the school community become sensitized with information regarding what bullying is and how they should respond (Farrell, Meyer, Kung, & Sullivan, 2001; Smith et al., 2004). Targeting adults is also a component of the intervention, since adults in the immediate environment have direct effect on the bullying process (Smith et al., 2004). Smith and his colleagues investigated whether effectiveness of the whole-school approach, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, was contingent on the age of the students, the characteristics of the intervention, or characteristics of the research design. Although the whole-school bullying prevention program has been tested in school districts in suburban areas, no studies have examined the efficacy of the program in low-income areas, thus far. Likewise, few studies of the program's impact have been conducted in inner-cities with high level of neighborhood and family poverty (Reynolds, 2001).

The core components of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program are implemented at the individual, classroom, and school levels. The major components of the program consist of the following: parents' involvement through discussion and information sessions; intervention with victims and perpetrators of bullying; regular classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy; school-wide rules against bullying;

school staff meetings concerning the program; formation of the Bullying Prevention Coordination Committee; training for school staff and committee members; development of a coordinated system for supervision; and an anonymous student questionnaire to assess the prevalence of bullying.

The major components of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program have demonstrated effectiveness in schools located in middle-class neighborhoods for reducing the prevalence of bullying and behavioral problems. However, little is known about the efficacy of the program in low-income schools with inadequate resources. Other research suggests that three of the components—parents' involvement in the bullying prevention program, intervention with victims and perpetrators of bullying, and classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy—might not be as effective in schools located in impoverished communities.

### Parents' Involvement in the Bullying Prevention Program

Recognizing that parenting practices may affect adolescent conduct and school behavioral problems (Eamon & Altshuler, 2004) and that an effective intervention should focus on family (Ary et al., 1999; Gross, Sambrook, & Fogg, 1999), the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program includes the parents of bully victims and perpetrators in all three levels. At the individual level, the component of the program includes discussion with parents of students involved in bullying. At the classroom level, the program consists of holding information meetings with the parents. Parents are also involved in the bullying prevention at the school level (Blueprint for Violence Prevention, 2002–2004). However, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has not considered the socioeconomic situation of parents in impoverished communities, particularly African American and Hispanic teenage parents. With the onset of welfare reform (welfare-to-work) legislation in 1996, childcare responsibilities of low-income family have shifted from parents to non-parental caregivers (Gross et al., 1999). Since 1998, about 84% of the single mothers of school age children in low socioeconomic neighborhoods have been participating in the labor force (Gross et al., 1999; Vandell & Ramanan, 1992). For many low-income, single African American and Hispanic mothers, employment under the welfare reform measure involves working long hours with little or no time to properly monitor their children's behavior at home or in school. Thus, parental involvement in a bullying prevention program is difficult.

In addition, parents in poor communities are more likely to employ harsh discipline than parents in upper/middle class neighborhoods. Ary et al. (1999) noted that the most powerful predictors of aggression and later delinquency were parenting variables, especially those pertaining to harsh discipline and poor parental supervision. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has not considered factors, which are directly related to

aggressive youth behavior and bullying in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. For example, parental discipline that is inconsistently or harshly applied has been associated with adolescent behavioral problems (Gross et al., 1999). Likewise, family discord, in conjunction with nonresponsive and harsh parental discipline, is high among impoverished neighborhoods, which negatively affect socio-emotional development of children and youths (Evans, 2004). Authoritarian parenting style is a predictor of children's maladaptive behavior (Eamon, 2001; Gershoff, 2002; Grogan-Kaylor, 2004), and among racial/ethnic minority youths in low-income neighborhoods, harsh parenting predicts antisocial behavior. Eamon and Mulder (2005) found that although only 6% of Latino mothers reported spanking their children, children who were physically disciplined had much higher risk of exhibiting antisocial behavior than those who were not physically disciplined. Further, in dangerous and impoverished neighborhoods, harsh parental disciplining is used in poor families, particularly among minority parents, as a way to teach their children to adjust to harsh environments (Klebanov et al., 1994).

### Intervention with the Individual—Bullies and Bullying Victims

Teachers serve as a role model and refuge for students who encounter situations that they may define as beyond their control (Bowen, Richman, Brewster, & Bowen, 1998). For bully victims, teachers are perceived as a refuge when they feel threatened by their aggressors. Unfortunately, in their survey of 119 teachers who were asked about their beliefs regarding mental health service needs in six inner-city elementary schools, Walter et al. (2006) found that teachers had limited knowledge about behavioral problems and treatment in the classroom. Further, students in low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have well-qualified teachers (Evans, 2004) who could properly address the problems of bullying. Thus, education and training of teachers to understand and manage behavioral problems, including bullying, is crucial (Walter et al., 2006). Teachers can play a crucial role in assisting the individual to make sense out of confusing and potentially dangerous situations at school (Bowen et al., 1998).

Effective individual-based interventions in schools located in poor communities must include teacher support. In a study, which reviewed the influence of three *microsystems*—school, neighborhood, and family—on academic achievement and school outcomes, students who perceive teachers as supportive and caring are more likely to perform better academically and less likely to engage in disruptive behavior (e.g., bullying) (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006). Thomas and Smith (2004) also contended that there is a direct relationship between school disconnectedness and risk factors, such as delinquency, drug use, and peer aggression. Teachers or school officials working with bullies or bully victims in low-income educational

settings must demonstrate a caring attitude in which students feel connected to their school. Unfortunately, school connectedness has been a problem for many minority students in poor neighborhoods where they feel less affinity to school, given that teachers frequently mete out punishment. There has been growing evidence that African American students are more severely disciplined by their teachers than whites, and are more likely than their white counterparts to be suspended. They are also more likely than white students to be punished for “nebulous infractions,” such as being too noisy (Thomas & Smith, 2004).

### Intervention at the Classroom Level—Increasing Knowledge and Empathy

In conjunction with intervention at the individual level, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is implemented at the classroom level. The major focus at the classroom level is to raise awareness of the problems of bullying and to promote *empathy* for students who are bullied by other students. The relationship between empathy and aggressive behavior in children and adolescents has been researched for decades (Sams & Truscott, 2004), and studies have consistently shown that low levels of empathy lead to higher levels of aggressive and violent behavior among youths (Sams & Truscott, 2004). Researchers have concluded that empathy plays a role in inhibiting aggressive behavior, and several successful training programs, which emphasize empathic responding, have been proven effective (Gordon, 2002; Sams & Truscott, 2004). Empathic responding begins in infancy and continues throughout adolescence (Sams & Truscott, 2004). It has been proposed as a prerequisite for promoting pro-social behavior (McMahon, Wernsman, & Parnes, 2006; Sams & Truscott, 2004). Garner et al. (1997) noted that mother’s empathy-related talks with their children are positively related to children’s emotional development, which fosters social sensitivity and empathy. Curtner-Smith et al. (2006) examined the link between mothers’ parenting and children’s direct and indirect bullying in a sample of children in a Head Start program. They found that maternal empathy was most strongly correlated with children’s direct (e.g., physical aggression) and indirect (e.g., spreading rumor) bullying behavior. Pro-social training programs, which promote empathy, target adolescents who have demonstrated conduct problems (Sams & Truscott, 2004).

McMahon et al. (2006) argued that the vast majority of researchers on empathy have focused on white middle-class populations. Risk factors that are high in inner-city neighborhoods, such as alcohol and drug exposure, inadequate parenting, and limited educational opportunities, combined with exposure to community violence, all play a role in impaired empathy among adolescents (Sams & Truscott, 2004). Although empathy can serve as an antidote to aggression (Gordon, 2002), several studies have pointed out

that low-income mothers who reported directing high level of anger toward their children were more likely to have children who were deficient in the understanding of emotion (Garner et al., 1997). As a result, empathy development of youths becomes thwarted.

Empathic responding also requires a close examination of gender differences in socialization. Strauss (2004) stated that empathy is more important in female identity than male identity. She noted early scholars who theorized that girls develop their gender identity as being akin to their primary caretaker (e.g., mother), whereas boys' sense of masculinity requires dissociating with their primary caretaker. Throughout their formative childhood years, girls develop a much stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as their own than do boys (Strauss, 2004). For boys, empathy is associated with femininity, which they perceive as a threat to their masculine identity. Boys carve out their gender identities through a cult of masculinity, which demonstrate their distance from feminine traits (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992). Bryant (1982) also found that boys (indicated believe that empathic responses to other boys denote homosexual tendencies, which they perceive as a threat to their masculinity. She concluded that boys during early adolescence are likely to rebuff sharing a wide range of affective experiences on the basis of their fear of peer rejection (Bryant, 1982).

The fear of peer rejection is high among African American boys from low-income neighborhoods. Hasbrook and Harris (1999) examined how first- and second- grade boys from a predominantly African American, inner-city school relied on their physical ability in the production of masculinity more than African American boys in a middle-class neighborhood. In contrast, this dominant masculinity does not appear to differ much among white adolescent boys from predominantly upper or middle-class schools (Hasbrook & Harris, 1999). Hasbrook and Harris found that among African American children in the inner-city, the most popular boys (typically bullies) were tough, competitive, and dominating. These boys challenged authority, expressed detachment from teachers, schools, and academic efforts, and disregarded feminine responses, such as empathizing. Thus, increasing awareness and empathy in the classroom requires consideration of gender differences and how masculinity is conceptualized among students in poor neighborhood.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Researchers on bullying interventions have overlooked the major differences between the peer and classroom dynamics in upper/middle-class and low-income communities. Although, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

focuses on the ecological factors, which includes the individual, classroom, and school, researchers must also understand the difference in socioeconomic and educational attainment of students in both types of communities. To determine the applicability of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in impoverished schools, the first step is to conduct a pilot study to test whether the instruments administered to the subjects are culturally relevant to those in poor communities. Because the number of residents in many low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities (mainly African Americans and Hispanics), self-report scales that are applicable to upper or middle-class White students may not be as relevant to minority children and parents. Self-report is often the preferred method of assessment of bullying behavior for research purposes (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Self-report scales must be sensitive to the unique problems that many racial/ethnic minorities face in their schools and communities. Peskin, Tortolero, Markham, Addy, & Baumler, (2007), who studied bullying/victimization and internalizing symptoms among low-income African American and Hispanic middle and high school students, shed some light on these issues. They found that while stress associated with bullying victimization creates internalizing problems (e.g., depression) for minority students, other stresses may exacerbate their feeling of victimization. These stresses result from problems, such as cultural challenges associated with feeling connected to one's ethnic heritage, possible discrimination, and for recent immigrants, living in a new cultural society.

Although researchers in recent years have begun investigating racially-motivated bullying and harassment (see Wessler & De Andrade, 2006), little is known about intra-racial/ethnic bullying, which is prevalent among African American and racial/ethnic minority children. Intra-racial/ethnic bullying warrants closer examination. African American children perceived as "not being black enough" due to high achievement and career aspirations are picked on by their lower-achieving peers for "acting White." Likewise, for many Hispanics and Asian immigrant children, there tends to be a major division between assimilated children (typically second-generation American-born children) and immigrant children (with limited English proficiency), which have perpetuated social exclusion. Derogatory labels, such as "white-washed," "FOBS," and "wet-backs" have generated bullying behavior among racial/ethnic minority children (e.g., Pyke & Dang, 2003) in school and in their communities. To my knowledge, however, no research on bullying intervention has considered intra-racial/ethnic bullying among minority and immigrant children. If bullying intervention is to be effective in low-income, minority schools, then this is an issue that must be examined and effectively addressed in any program designed to reduce bullying.

Instruments measuring the effectiveness of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program must also include the major stressors among residents in low-income neighborhoods that possibly contribute to peer aggression in

schools and communities. King (1997) pointed out, for example, that the destructive effects of economic deprivation, substance abuse, and access to firearms in African American communities forced millions of African American boys and teenagers to live under social and economic conditions that undermine their growth and development, which invariably affects their educational attainment and classroom behavior. Anderson (1999) also showed that aggressive behavior among many African American boys and teenagers in inner-cities is perceived as a “strategies for survival in a harsh world.” The economic and psychological stress of single parents in poor communities must also be examined in the research on bullying interventions. Also, given the circumstances that most of these parents live in would prevent such participation, the program must incorporate methods that might break down some of these barriers (e.g., provide childcare, transportation expense, etc.).

Specialized training for teacher and school staff members, coordinated system of supervision, and reinforcement of school rules against bullying have been proven effective in upper/middle-class schools. However, teachers in schools located in poor communities and inner-cities face challenges that obstruct effective anti-bullying intervention primarily due to limited resources. Many teachers in low-income and inner-city schools not only enforce harsh disciplinary measures, but encounter stressful situations, which may be potentially dangerous. Thus, studies on bullying interventions in poor areas must include a thorough assessment of the stressful situations that teachers and staff members face, which create a barrier to effective bullying prevention. After the assessment is completed, effective strategies to address these unique stressful situations must be developed and incorporated into the bully prevention program.

Although the intervention includes supervision and training for teachers, community outreach is crucial for children in schools located in poor neighborhoods. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has also included community-level components, such as meetings with community leaders and incorporating anti-bullying strategies through youth-related activities in communities and outreach. Unfortunately, these outreach efforts have been found to be weak (Astor, Pitner, & Ducan, 1998; Olweus, 1991). Therefore, researchers desiring to adapt and evaluate the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program for these communities, must first provide opportunities for community leaders to have input into the program’s goals and interventions.

This article not only serves as an impetus for evaluating the efficacy of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in low-income neighborhood, but serves as a blueprint for systematically addressing the gaps in the existing bullying prevention intervention research. By doing so, researchers interested in developing and evaluating effective bullying prevention programs for youths living in poor areas can begin addressing major issues that are relevant to youths, parents, educators, and community leaders in these neighborhoods.

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