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Social-Ecological Problems Associated with Bullying Behaviors

In Chapter 1, we outlined a social-ecological model of bullying behavior based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) well-known social-ecological theory. In plain terms, bullying behaviors from this perspective emerges from a complex intersection of children's personality and disposition, which becomes modified as they enter into various contexts across early childhood and adolescence. For example, we are often asked by parents, colleagues, and friends, along with hairdressers and cab drivers, the all too familiar question, "What causes children to bully others?" In order to answer this question, the following scenario is one that might emerge from the research literature.

Imagine 11-year-old Sally, who has a personality that might be described as impulsive and is quick to anger, especially when she experiences frustration. This alone will not cause us concern that she might bully others. However, if Sally resides in a family in which poor anger management skills are modeled or there is a general lack of emotional regulation training and her sister bullies her, then there is more evidence that she might be at risk to bully her peers at school. Then we find out that Sally goes to a school in which there is no explicit bully policy and bullying is not addressed by teachers, staff, or administrators. Her individual personality characteristics will interact with these less-than-prosocial environments, and then when she joins a peer group in which the members bully others for fun, Sally is at risk for joining in. Within this example, it is clear that individual personality factors influence whether these social contexts exacerbate or minimize the development of bullying perpetration. Children who are victims of bullying also have individual personality characteristics (e.g., shyness, social skills deficits) that influence how their social development will progress as they enter different social contexts.

Individual and social contextual factors are embedded within one another, and they influence each other in a reciprocal and circular manner. That is, children and adolescents who bully others will inevitably be received differently in their homes, schools, and communities. Similarly, children and adolescents who are victimized will, in some cases, approach these social contexts in ways that might contribute to increased victimization across dif-

ferent domains, or it might lead them to not reach out to others and fully take advantage of these environments. And to be honest, children and adolescents who are victims will perceive, sometimes accurately, these environments as unsafe and intolerable. This complex dynamic is exactly the focus of this chapter. Children and adolescents who are identified as bullies, victims, or bully-victims face consequences of their experiences in their own individual social development and mental health and in their interactions with family, friends, peers, and schoolteachers and administrators. In this chapter, the research on these consequences, both good and bad, is briefly reviewed, with special attention given to the clinical implications of the research.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES

A wide range of emotions surround experiences of being victimized or perpetrating bullying. Victimized youth report more loneliness, greater school avoidance, more suicidal ideation, and less self-esteem than their nonbullied peers (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996a). Depression also has been found to be a common mental health symptom experienced by male and female victims of bullying (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelae, & Rantanen, 2001; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001). Further, being victimized is associated with physical health problems, such as headaches and stomachaches (Srabstein, McCarter, Shao, & Huang, 2006). Victims are also often characterized as more insecure, anxious, and quiet than their peers (Olweus, 1995a), and children who report high rates of victimization receive lower grades than those not identified as bullies or victims (Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006). Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, and Toblin (2005) found that victimization predicted poor academic performance over time. Victimization impacts children both in the short term and into their adult years. Long-term impact was noted with Olweus's (1995b) longitudinal study of 23-year-old participants; those who were victimized in their youth reported greater symptoms of depression and less self-esteem than cohort peers who were not victimized.

Whereas victimized youth tend to report more internalizing behaviors (e.g., depression, anxiety), students who bully are more likely than their peers to engage in externalizing behaviors such as conduct problems, to report lower levels of school belonging, and to engage in delinquent behavior (Espelage & Holt, 2001; Haynie, Nansel, & Eitel, 2001). It appears that physical health problems are not unique to victims; that is, bullies also report more significant physical health symptoms than uninvolved youth (Srabstein et al., 2006). In addition, anger has been found to be a significant predictor of bullying perpetration (Espelage & Holt, 2001). These studies find that students who are prone to depression, and therefore have lowered self-esteem, might tease or bully others in order to make themselves feel better. This anger, if not attended to, can result in more serious criminal involvement. Olweus (1993a, 1993b) found that bullies at a young age in Norway were more likely to be convicted of crimes in adulthood, and another study of American youth identified as bullies in school found that these individuals had a 1 in 4 chance of having a criminal record by age 30 (Eron, Huesmann, Dubow, Romanoff, & Yarnel, 1987).

What is important to remember is that the majority of work relating bullying perpetration or victimization to these outcomes is largely correlational, which does not mean that perpetration or victimization *causes* these outcomes. Victimization and perpetration have been found to have complex relations with other potentially intervening or mediating variables. For example, when students are teased, for some, the teasing results in them questioning their own identity, wondering what it is about them that contributes to their victimization, and these thoughts could then lead to distressing feelings, such as depression or lowered self-confidence or self-esteem (Graham & Juvonen, 2001). It is not surprising that those students who are often victimized at school report higher levels of state and trait anxiety (Craig, 1998; Rigby & Slee, 1993). Their victimization is often unpredictable and happens in places where there are few adults, which can create fear and hypervigilance, fueling the anxiety.

Finally, it is important to recognize that bully-victims represent the most at-risk group of youth. Bully-victims are those students who report being victimized by their peers and also being perpetrators. Bully-victims demonstrate more externalizing behaviors, are more hyperactive, and have a greater probability of being referred for psychiatric consultation than their peers (Nansel et al., 2001; Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2003). Bully-victims have also been found to report higher levels of depression compared with both bullies and victims (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Swearer et al., 2001c). Similarly, bully-victims have been found to have lower grades than both bullies and victims and were reported by teachers to be the least engaged of their students (Graham et al., 2006).

In summary, there is considerable evidence that involvement in bullying, as a victim, bully, or bully-victim, is associated with serious short-term and long-term psychological and academic consequences. Despite this level of evidence, many children who suffer from mental and physical health symptoms go unnoticed by parents, teachers, and family physicians. It is important to notice any systematic changes in a child's or adolescent's mood or academic performance. Professionals who have any exposure to children, including nurses, social workers, teachers, and pediatricians, should specifically ask about victimization or bullying experiences. Questions should be open ended in format and should be asked in a way to normalize the experiences and to create the conditions under which students feel free to openly express their feelings.

PEER INFLUENCES

Peers play an integral role in the social development of children and adolescents. Emerging research has also shown that peers are integral in supporting and maintaining bullying victimization and perpetration in our schools. There are several dominant theories that have demonstrated that kids learn to bully each other from their peers. Additionally, some students who are bullies are among the most popular students and are looked up to by others. Although the processes of peer influence are complicated, the major theories are outlined in simple terms here to make direct points about how peers can be used to prevent bullying perpetration and victimization.

The first theory is called *homophily* (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). Although the word might not be familiar to many readers, the concept behind it is simple. Take, for example, the phrase "Birds of a feather flock together." Students in late elementary school through high school tend to hang out or befriend peers who are similar to them in attitudes, interests, and behaviors. It is true that some students select each other based on similarity in these characteristics, but it is also true that peers socialize one another into acting and behaving a certain way by internalizing norms of the group (Kandel, 1978). Support for the homophily hypothesis has been documented in the bullying literature, which has found that individuals within the same friendship group tend to report engaging in similar levels of bullying behaviors (Espelage et al., 2003; Espelage, Green, & Wasserman, 2007). Put simply, bullies hang out with bullies. But not all peer groups are made up of members who perpetrate bullying from the outset. That is, bullies within a peer group with high social status socialize their friends to engage in bullying behaviors. Moreover, bullying levels within the peer group are predictive of adolescents' bullying behavior over time, even after controlling for individuals' own baseline levels of bullying, a finding that holds true for both males and females.

As seen in Figure 1.1, individuals move and out of bullying/victimization roles. Salmivalli et al. (1996) have spent the last decade examining specifically the various roles that children play as bullying occurs. They consistently find that individuals are not victimized by a single individual. Rather, bullying involves both active and passive participation of multiple individuals. Students have been found to assist in the process by chasing or holding down the victim for the bully. Students may also reinforce bullying by encouraging the bullies to continue their aggressive behavior toward the victim or by further teasing the victim. Some students, albeit a small number, support the victimized individual by attempting to stop the bully, finding help for the victim, or providing psychological support for the victim after the bullying episode is over. Finally, other students might be classified as outsiders or bystanders; these individuals are not involved in bullying episodes, or they are those individuals who leave the situation when the bullying episode begins (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Homophily provides some notion that children hang out with similarly minded individuals in relation to bullying. Others theories offer some explanation as to how and why this socialization occurs. Dominance theory is one of these. Aggression has long been recognized as a means of establishing dominance among children's groups. Developmental psychologists have demonstrated that establishing higher status with groups yields greater access to resources and greater control or influence over other peers (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002; Boulton, 1992; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Dominance status can be attained through either affiliative (e.g., leadership) or antagonistic (e.g., bullying) methods (Hawley, 1999). Research suggests that dominance is initially established through antagonistic methods late in elementary school, followed by affiliative methods later in middle school or further into the establishment of the peer group (Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

The need for dominance and developmental timing has offered some perspective on why the prevalence of bullying shifts over the school years. More specifically, bullying perpetration typically increases during transition periods, such as from elementary school to middle school (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). These transitions often

require a change in primary affiliation groups and a new school environment. Bullying is often used at these time points to establish control over other students and directly impacts the roles that children and adolescents assume with these peer groups. An example of this phenomenon is illustrated in the following story. Data from a school district indicated that bullying behaviors in its school system dramatically increased from fifth grade (last year of elementary school) to sixth grade (first year of middle school). The elementary and the middle school staff and the district staff decided to keep the fifth-grade teams the same as the students entered sixth grade. Over time, they noted that this consistency in peer group structure between the last year of elementary school and the first year of middle school resulted in less bullying behaviors during the sixth-grade year. Additionally, the middle schools decided to have the school counselors follow the same cohort of students throughout their middle school years (versus having sixth-grade counselors, seventh-grade counselors, and eighth-grade counselors who were different across the years). This consistency in counselors for the students also helped them navigate the social intricacies of the middle school years. The collaboration between the elementary, middle, and district staff helped mitigate the dominance factor that has been associated with increases in bullying behaviors.

A third theory that is particularly relevant to understanding how peers influence and maintain bullying perpetration in our schools is attraction theory. Attraction theory posits that young adolescents become attracted to other youth who possess characteristics reflecting independence (e.g., delinquency, aggression, disobedience) and are less attracted to those who possess characteristics more descriptive of childhood (e.g., compliance, obedience) as they attempt to establish independence from their own parents (Bukowski, Sippola, & Newcomb, 2000; Moffitt, 1993). These authors argue that young adolescents manage the transition from primary to secondary schools through their attractions to peers who are aggressive. In a study of 217 boys and girls during this transition, Bukowski and colleagues found that girls' and boys' attraction to aggressive peers increased on entry to middle school. This increase was larger for girls, which is consistent with Pellegrini and Bartini's (2001) finding that, at the end of middle school, girls nominated "dominant boys" as dates to a hypothetical party.

Popularity research supports these findings in that bullies and aggressive peers are not always viewed negatively by other students and certainly are not socially rejected as perceived many years ago among aggression researchers. Instead, in some cases, aggressive kids and bullies are nominated as popular by their peers in elementary school (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000) and associate with individuals rated similarly in popularity and aggression (Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O'Neil, & Cairns, 2003; Farmer et al., 2002). As kids transition to middle school, aggressive and "tough boys" have also been nominated as cool by other aggressive boys and by some girls (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2006).

It is important to understand how peers can, at times, also be a great source of support for children and adolescents. Peers can model prosocial and caring attitudes and behaviors. For example, adolescents with low levels of prosocial behaviors in sixth grade, relative to their friends, demonstrated improved prosocial behaviors at the end of eighth grade (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Peers can also be sources of support when students are being victimized (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). In one study, peer victimization was not associated

with internalizing and externalizing behavior problems for those youth with sufficient social support (Hodges & Perry, 1999).

FAMILIAL FACTORS

Families are the major socialization agent for young children. Parents, siblings, and other caregivers provide children with examples of learning emotions, regulating emotions, negotiating conflict, problem-solving situations, and developing other life skills. Unfortunately, children are sometimes presented with less than ideal role models and learn pro-aggression attitudes, develop an inability to identify or regulate emotions, learn a restricted range of emotional reactions to distressing situations (e.g., anger), and often fail to gain the necessary problem-solving or coping skills to manage situations at school and in their community. Climates of families vary substantially; however, there are some general observations regarding families who have children who are bullies, victims, or bully-victims. As a group, bullies report that their parents are more authoritarian, condone "fighting back," and use physical punishment (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Olweus, 1995b), and these families have been described as lacking in warmth and structure, low in family cohesion, and high in family conflict (Oliver, Oaks, & Hoover, 1994; Olweus, 1993a; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuji, & Van Oost, 2002).

Positive and negative attachments to parents have been found to be important in the emergence of bullying perpetration and victimization. Specifically, children who had insecure, anxious-avoidant, or anxious-resistant attachment styles at 18 months of age were more likely than children with secure attachments to become involved in bullying perpetration at ages 4 and 5 (Troy & Sroufe, 1987). On the other hand, McFadyen-Ketchum, Bates, Dodge, and Pettit (1996) found that aggressive children who experienced affectionate mother–child relationships showed significant decreases in aggressive/disruptive behaviors.

In a recent study examining factors that predicted bullying across the transition from elementary school to middle school, Espelage, Holt, Poteat, and VanBoven (in press) found that teacher attachment in fifth grade was a strong predictor of lower levels of bullying for students during their sixth-grade year, even after controlling for their level of bullying during their fifth-grade year. Furthermore, teacher attachment was the strongest predictor of lower levels of bullying, whereas other factors (e.g., parental attachment, social acceptance, and psychological functioning) were nonsignificant predictors after controlling for previous levels of bullying behavior. This finding provides additional support for the importance of the social context and students' interactions with not only their peers but also their teachers in accounting for and predicting their engagement in bullying behavior over a transitional period that can be difficult for many students.
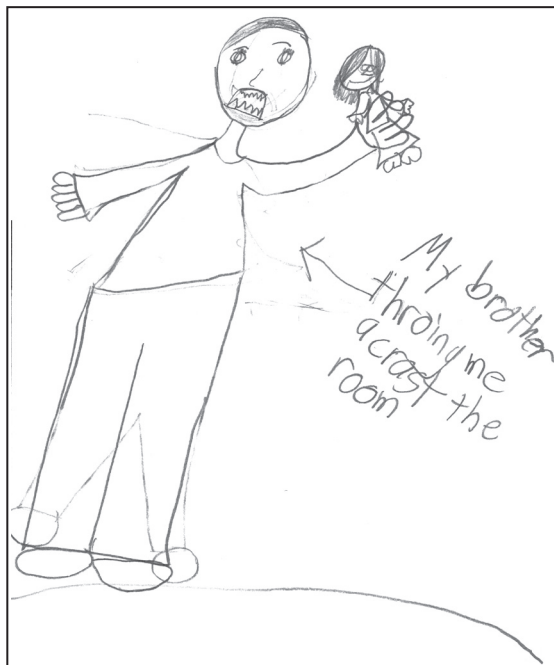
Parental social support is another factor related to bullying involvement; middle school students classified as bullies and bully-victims indicated receiving substantially less social support from parents than students in the uninvolved group (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). There have been mixed findings with respect to family structure and bullying, with some studies showing a heightened risk for youth in nonintact families (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003) and others finding no association (Espelage et al., 2000). Finally, witnessing domestic

violence and experiencing child maltreatment are associated with bullying perpetration (Baldry, 2003; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001).

A unique set of family characteristics exists for victims of bullying. Families of victims often have high levels of cohesion (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994). Further, victims are more likely to have less authoritative parents (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998) and live in families in which there are low levels of negotiation (Oliver et al., 1994) and high levels of conflict (Mohr, 2006). Some evidence suggests that family structure and income are associated with being victimized by peers. In particular, in a study of Nordic children, both living in a single-parent home and having a low socioeconomic status family were associated with increased odds of being bullied (Nordhagen, Nielsen, Stigum, & Kohler, 2005). Further, as summarized by Duncan (2004), there appear to be some family characteristics of victims that vary by the child's gender. For instance, whereas male victims often have overly close relationships with their mothers, female victims are more likely to have mothers who withdraw love. Finally, peer victimization is associated with greater victimization in other domains, such as child maltreatment (Holt, Finkelhor, & Kaufman Kantor, 2007).

Less research has focused on family environments of bully-victims, although evidence suggests that parents of bully-victims tend to be less warm and more overprotective than parents of uninvolved youth and provide inconsistent discipline and monitoring (Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1997; Smith, Bowers, Binney, & Cowie, 1993). In addition, families of bully-victims are characterized by low levels of cohesion, although not as low as cohesion levels in families of bullies (Bowers et al., 1994).

A growing body of literature has assessed the influence of sibling aggression. Duncan (1999) surveyed 375 middle school students, 336 of whom had siblings. According to the results, 42% reported that they often bullied their siblings, 24% reported they often pushed

or hit their brothers and sisters, and 11% stated that they often beat up their siblings. A smaller group (30%) reported that siblings frequently victimized them, with 22% stating they were often hit or pushed around and 8% reporting they were often beaten up by a sibling. What is most pertinent to this discussion is the finding that 57% of bullies and 77% of bully-victims reported also bullying their siblings. A previous study by Bowers et al. (1994) detected a similar pattern of relations, finding that youth who bullied others reported negative and ambivalent relationships with siblings and viewed their siblings as more powerful than themselves. The opposite was found for victimized youth, who reported enmeshed and positive relationships with their siblings (Bowers et al., 1994).

SCHOOL FACTORS

Social control theory is a dominant theory in the literature to explain the development of both prosocial and antisocial behavior (Hirschi, 1969). This theory postulates that as individuals establish connections with conventional institutions within society (e.g., schools, churches, community organizations), they are less prone to wrongdoing and more likely to internalize norms of appropriate conduct. A conventional institution that is experienced by most children at a young age is school. Positive school bonding has been associated with lowered risk of student substance abuse, truancy, and other acts of misconduct (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). However, considerable debate has emerged over many decades about what aspects of the school environment make a difference in buffering any negative family or community factors to which children are exposed. Early research focused on tangible, physical aspects of the school environment, including teacher–student ratio, population, and budget (Griffith, 1996; Huber, 1983; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979), with inconsistent associations with these factors and academic outcomes for students.

More recent research has focused on expanding school influence investigations to include broader constructs such as school policies, teacher attitudes, and the general ethos of a school as potential predictors of children's academic, social, and psychological development. Kasen and colleagues have produced the vast majority of the research in the past 17 years on the relation among school climate factors (Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004; Kasen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998; Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990). In their earliest work, Kasen et al. (1990) found that students (ages 6–16 years) who went to schools with high rates of student–student and teacher–student conflict had significantly greater increases in oppositional, attentional, and conduct problems, whereas those from "well-organized, harmonious schools" that emphasized learning reported decreases in these outcomes. A follow-up study involving this sample found that students from the highly conflictual schools were at increased risk for alcohol abuse and a criminal conviction 6 years later (Kasen et al., 1998).

School climate is emerging as an extremely important influence on bullying/victimization. Kasen et al.'s (2004) study is perhaps the most comprehensive examination of the impact of school climate on changes in verbal and physical aggression, anger, and school problem indices. In this study, 500 children (and their mothers) across 250 schools were surveyed at the ages of 13½ and 16 years across a 2½-year interval. A 45-item school climate survey included multiple scales assessing social and emotional features of the school environment, including a conflict scale (classroom control, teacher–student conflict), learning focus scale, social facilitation scale, and student authority scale (student has say in politics and planning) as predictors. Outcome measures included a wide range of scales, including school problems, deviance, rebelliousness, anger, physical and verbal aggression, and bullying. Results found that after controlling for baseline aggression, students in highly conflictual schools had an increase in verbal and physical aggression. In contrast, attendance at schools that emphasized learning resulted in a decrease in aggression and other school-related problems. Of particular interest was the finding that schools high in informal relations had increases in bullying perpetration over the 2½-year interval and schools with high conflict and high informality combined had the highest increase in bullying over time.

School climate is a particularly important variable to consider because adult supervision decreases from elementary to middle school. In turn, less structure and supervision are associated with concomitant increases in bullying rates among middle school students, in particular in locations such as playgrounds and lunchrooms (Craig & Pepler, 1997). Additionally, bullying occurs at a higher rate in hallways between classes (AAUW, 2001) and other places where students often report feeling unsafe and afraid (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001). Astor and colleagues (2001) offer additional insights into how students and teachers in both elementary and middle schools perceive public spaces in their schools as violence-prone locations. In that study, these authors drew on theories of territoriality and undefined public spaces to argue that bullying and other violent acts are more likely to occur in undefined public spaces (e.g., hallways, stairwells) than in places that are more defined as being someone's territory (e.g., classrooms). As part of the study, students in five elementary schools and two middle schools in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 were presented with maps of their school and asked to identify places where they felt unsafe or they felt were dangerous.

Qualitative and quantitative analyses supported the early school climate work but also provided some new information that has direct prevention implications for school administrators. It was not surprising that students in all schools perceived places lacking in adult supervision and monitoring as unsafe. Crowding and bullying were consistently mentioned as reasons for feeling unsafe. Middle school students reported feeling less safe than elementary school students and were not certain which adults they could turn to for help. Similarly, middle school teachers reported greater conflict in their role in monitoring public spaces. Although middle school students reported feeling unsafe in most undefined public spaces, elementary school students reported feeling less safe on playgrounds than middle school students. These results suggest that bullying could be decreased in schools by first understanding where bullying is happening through Astor et al.'s (2001) mapping procedure. These data could then be used to develop an increase in monitoring of the high-frequency areas.

Bullying also occurs within the confines of the classroom. As such, it is clear that classroom practices and teachers' attitudes are also salient components of school climate that contribute to bullying prevalence. Aggression varies from classroom to classroom, and in some instances aggression is supported. For example, researchers have found levels of aggression in elementary school to significantly differ across classrooms (Henry et al., 2000; Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998), and those aggressive students in classrooms with norms supportive of aggression become

more aggressive over time compared with students in less aggressive classrooms. Bullying tends to be less prevalent in classrooms where most children are included in activities (R. S. Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001), teachers display warmth and responsiveness to children (Olweus et al., 1999), and teachers respond quickly and effectively to bullying incidents (Olweus, 1993a, 1993b). Furthermore, Hoover and Hazler (1994) note that when school personnel tolerate, ignore, or dismiss bullying behaviors, they are conveying implicit messages about values that victimized students internalize. Additionally, students who bully others tend to do so when adults are not around.

SOCIETAL CONSEQUENCES

Certainly, being bullied or bullying others is not unique to American schools; it has been identified as a common occurrence in other venues, including workplaces and prisons. Even within the best practices of prevention, bullying is not likely to simply go away, and it is clear from some of the literature discussed in this chapter that there are major incentives for children and adolescents who bully others and often little support for the victims. The bottom line is that sometimes bullies are effective in using their aggression to get what they want, and this behavior is likely to continue into their intimate relationships and their working relationships. For example, there are some preliminary data that kids who bully their peers in late elementary school are more likely to be identified as students who sexually harass their peers in middle school (Pelligrini, 2002b) and are also more likely to report being verbally and physically abusive in dating relationships (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). Although a substantial amount of research needs to be conducted to substantiate a connection between these forms of aggression, preliminary evidence suggests that there might be something similar in the underlying phenomena. These studies and this research are expanded in the next chapter as we take on the discussion of bullying as a social relationship problem.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, factors that relate to the development and continuation of bullying perpetration and victimization have been introduced and discussed briefly. It is clear from the literature that bullying emerges as a result of a multitude of factors, including a child's personality, home environment, peers, and experiences at school. Children and adolescents who are at risk for engaging in bullying behaviors or are who at risk for being victimized report experiencing multiple risk factors and have fewer protective experiences. It is clear from the research that there are several "stopping points" for children to not become a bully, bully-victim, or victim. That is, social support, supportive friends, a positive school climate, involvement in extracurricular activities, and a supportive family all serve to protect or buffer children from both experiencing and expressing bullying, and these factors also serve to minimize the psychological impact of these deleterious behaviors (see Figure 2.1).
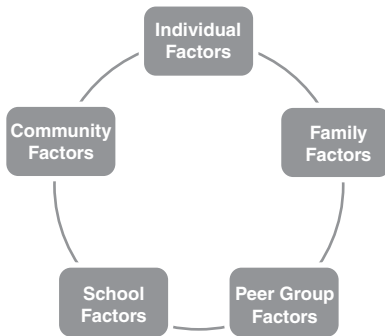
What are some interventions that you can do at each "stopping point"?

Social-Ecological Factors	Y/N?	Y/N?	Y/N?	Y/N?	Make a list
Individual Factors	Individual counseling?	Group counseling?	Working with school psychologists, counselors, and social workers?	Teach healthy problem solving and conflict resolution?	Other?
Family Factors	Work with parents/caregivers?	Encourage parental involvement?	Report any suspected neglect or abuse?	Create a supportive climate for parents?	Other?
Peer Group Factors	Teach about the negative consequences of bullying?	Actively intervene in the peer group and break apart negative groups?	Identify and reward positive leaders?	Create conditions in your school where bullying is not rewarded?	Other?
School Factors	Treat all adults and students with respect?	Adults intervene consistently when they see bullying?	Students who bully others are helped and taught how to change their behaviors?	The school climate is positive?	Other?
Community Factors	Community leaders work together to create a positive community?	Community resources are used to support schools and families?	Community–school partnerships are in place?	Schools are a vibrant part of the community?	Other?

FIGURE 2.1. Social-ecological model of bullying/victimization: Interventions.

CASE EXAMPLE: ANDREW

Andrew was identified for the gifted program at his school as a first grader. He had performed well in all academic areas until he reached middle school. After transitioning to middle school, his grades started falling. His love of learning and his enthusiasm for school diminished rapidly. In addition, Andrew began complaining of stomachaches and headaches on school days. His parents tried to talk with Andrew, but he always said everything was fine. His teachers provided little insight, and during fall conferences they even questioned whether there was something at home that was stressing him out.

Frustrated with the situation, Andrew's parents took him to his pediatrician for a physical. His pediatrician indicated that he was in excellent health and referred him for an eye exam. His vision checked out fine as well. After ruling out medical and vision difficulties, Andrew's doctor suggested that they schedule an appointment with a child psychologist to rule out possible psychological difficulties such as depression. Andrew's parents were initially uncomfortable with the idea of taking him to a psychologist because they did not know what to expect. Additionally, Andrew was very resistant to the idea, insisting that he was fine. After receiving his first semester report card with several Fs, Andrew's parents scheduled an appointment with the psychologist.

Although Andrew was initially resistant to going to a psychologist, his parents stuck with the therapy sessions. He gradually began to build trust with his psychologist and started sharing more of what had been bothering him at school. Most of the boys in his small class had been excluding him from participating in activities. This had been occurring both in and outside of school. For example, one of the boys would plan a party and not invite Andrew. When Andrew would ask about the activity, he was often told that they were sorry and must have forgotten to invite him. Andrew struggled with wanting to believe that these were simple oversights. However, as this pattern continued, he came to recognize that these were not simple mistakes. Additionally, in the school setting, he was often told he could not sit at certain tables during lunch time or participate in certain activities during recess. Andrew talked to his psychologist about feeling ashamed and lonely. Initially he wanted to talk with his teachers and parents about this, but he started to worry about their reaction. He had concerns that they would think he was a "loser" or a "reject." His parents had a lot a friends, and Andrew assumed that they may also be embarrassed by his situation.

Thoughts about Andrew's Case

More and more children seem to fit Andrew's description. Many children who are bullied are embarrassed by what is happening. They are often reluctant to talk about what is happening with their parents or teachers. Boys in particular tend to view being bullied as a sign of their own weakness and seem to feel more shame. Additionally, they are often taught not to "tattle" and to handle situations on their own. They may keep their worries and stresses to themselves, which often results in a negative impact on their daily functioning. It is hard to perform up to your potential when you are worried, stressed, and upset. Andrew talked about not being able to concentrate on his schoolwork because he was so focused on the fact that he was being bullied by his classmates.

How do parents respond in this type of situation? From a young age, children need to feel as though their parents are there to listen to them and accept them no matter what the situation. Opportunities to learn how to express and talk about feelings are essential. Modeling open expression of feelings and working to create an environment in which children feel accepted are critical, as is following up on children's concerns. When significant changes are noted in behaviors, moods, or physical functioning, it is often indicative of a larger problem. In Andrew's case, his parents' instincts told them that they should not just accept his assertions that everything was fine. They took the steps to follow up with several different doctors, even though their son was quite resistant initially.

Once Andrew began talking with his psychologist and opening up about his problems, things began to improve. He was able to learn more effective coping skills to deal with difficult situations. Additionally, he was able to develop strategies for initiating and maintaining positive peer relationships.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

1. A social-ecological conceptualization of bullying encourages us to think about individual, peer, family, school, and societal factors that all interact to contribute to bullying behaviors. What were the social-ecological factors that contributed to this case?

2. After the transition to middle school, Andrew's grades dropped and he experienced psychosomatic complaints. His parents noted this change in behavior and took him to talk with a psychologist. Think about students you know who have displayed a change in behavior. Does your school have a referral system for these kids?

3. We often hear that when students are experiencing bullying in school, they don't tell adults for fear of being seen as weak and rejected. How can adults encourage students to express their feelings openly? What systems are in place at your school or home that encourage the sharing of feelings?

4. William Pollack, author of *Real Boys* (1998), writes that many boys are depressed and lonely and that our society forces them to suppress their true emotions. What supports exist for boys to talk about their feelings about being bullied or about bullying others? How might societal pressures that reward strength, power, and dominance send conflicting messages to our young people about the importance of healthy relationships and respect for all?