

Keeping students safe: The relationship between collective efficacy, teacher protection, and student bullying

Page A. Smith

University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio
TX 78249

W. Sean Kearney

Texas A & M University – San Antonio
One University Way, San Antonio
TX 78224

Betty M. Merchant

University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio
TX 78249

Abstract

This study examines the relationships between educators' perceptions of student bullying, teacher protection, and collective efficacy in light of school size and socioeconomic status. The sample is comprised of teachers from 108 elementary schools in south central Texas, USA. The study utilizes the Bully Scale to measure perceptions of student bullying and teacher protection, and the Collective Efficacy Scale to gauge the collective efficacy of teachers. Descriptive statistics are computed and summarized for all variables, and correlation coefficients are computed for each aspect of school bullying and collective efficacy. Multiple regression analyses demonstrate collective efficacy, school size, and socioeconomic status form a linear combination that explains a significant portion of the variance in both student bullying and teacher protection.

Keywords: bullying; collective efficacy; teacher protection; student safety

1. Introduction

Traditionally, public schools have been viewed as relatively safe places. However, in recent years, widely publicized incidents of school violence have prompted questions about the ability of school leaders to educate students in environments where safety is jeopardized. This is in stark contrast with the past, where student achievement goals were predominant. By most accounts, campus bullying is increasing at an alarming rate and hopelessness, severe depression, and various types of psychological disorders often etch deep emotional scars in victims. Bullying is recognized as a world-wide problem, and student safety is emerging as a critical priority for schools across the globe (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Oldenburg, Bosman & Veenstra, 2016).

Although schools still remain pressed by achievement expectations, campus leaders are now further challenged to promote positive social dynamics and civility in response to the specters of school violence and student bullying behaviors. An increasing number of researchers are focusing their efforts on exploring the relationship between students' academic achievement and their experiences of bullying, and numerous studies conclude that bullying has a negative impact on students' academic achievement (Mundy, Canterford, Kosola, Degenhardt, Allen & Patton, 2017; Shetgiri, 2017; Strøm, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen & Dyb, 2013).

Without question, many incidents of school violence, including campus related shootings, suicides, and gang activity, are rooted in socially maladaptive behaviors such as bullying, and most communities now levy expectations on school leaders to control (or alleviate) such incidents (Author et al. 2004; Swearer et al. 2004; Espelage, Polanin & Low, 2014). Moreover, teachers are consistently pressed to actively engage the problems of schoolyard violence and curb student bullying in ways that secure both healthy and nonthreatening educational settings (Hastings et al. 2003, Author et al. 2017).

Furthermore, when bullying does occur, parents consistently complain that the school is not doing enough to garrison such actions. This indictment is particularly evident when at-risk campus populations such as physically challenged or LGBTQ populations are targeted (Rose et al. 2015; Schuster et al. 2015). Most certainly, it is the responsibility of school leaders to implement and enforce policies that promote a safe bully-free environment for all of its students. In the absence of teacher sensitivity to bullying, the propensity for school violence increases and the safety of at-risk students is jeopardized.

The effects of student bullying are widespread and can be traced according to actual school levels. To that end, physical aggression, the most common form of bullying, often emerges in elementary schools, peaks during the middle school years, and subsequently decreases during high school (Limber et al. 2018; Pellagrini 2001). For example, Williams et al. (2011) found that fifth graders in elementary school settings self-reported verbal, physical, and Internet bullying at 32.6%, 34.8%, and 4.5% respectively; eighth grade middle schools reported the same occurrences at 78.5%, 44.6%, and 12.9 %; and eleventh graders reported these incidents at 72.3%; 37.8%, and 9.9%.

As the social milieus of schools change, campus environments become more complex and opportunities for safe student exchanges are threatened. In fact, newer and more contemporary forms of bullying and cyber bullying proliferate (Smith, 2016). Indeed, these emergent forms of student-to-student aggression challenge the integrity of educational institutions and warrant the attention of all school stakeholders. Thus, bullying behaviors, whether physical or mental, often produce both catastrophic and protracted trauma in individuals, and imprint devastating side effects on bullies, their victims and by-standers.

This study assesses two important aspects of student bullying and the impact of the collective efficacy of teachers in light of school size and socioeconomic status. Thus, the central research question is "Does perceived collective efficacy of teachers predict the perception of bullying and teacher protection in schools?"

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Bullying

The definition of bullying has evolved over time to encompass myriad social interactions. Initially, Olweus (1978) described bullying as a form of peer abuse characterized as repeated physical or psychological aggression. The nature of the abuse takes on a variety of forms to include both physical and emotional characteristics, and participants may be involved in such incidences as the victim, perpetrator, or bystander (Craig et al. 2007; Limber et al. 2018).

Bullying is also conceptualized as being either direct or indirect. Author et al. (2004) describe direct forms of bullying as easily identifiable behaviors such as teasing and taunting, hitting, taking one's possessions, and making threats. More subtle and indirect forms of bullying include intentional exclusion and scapegoating, which result in social isolation. Indirect approaches to bullying also include mean gestures and facial expressions, gossiping, and spreading rumors (Koo 2007). Unfortunately, the "ways and means" of bullying are diverse and growing. To be sure, relational, physical, and verbal forms of bullying frequently surface to challenge campus environments and threaten safe schooling (Bauman et al. 2006; Limber et al. 2018).

Siyahhan et al.(2012) identified a higher level of hopelessness between victims of physical and verbal bullying, but no difference for victims of indirect bullying and non-victims. Higher levels of hopelessness were also apparent for victims who did not discuss bullying with their teachers or parents (Siyahhan et al.2012). Fitzpatrick et al. (2010) also found low-income, African-American youth, who self-identified as participants in some aspect of bullying, reported higher levels of depression than those with no involvement. Similarly, Sourander et al. (2007) unearthed a statistically significant correlation between frequent bullying and victimization, and long-term anxiety and antisocial personality disorder. In the investigation, approximately 28% of bullying victims were identified with psychiatric disorders up to 15 years after the initial victimization. And, Bond et al. (2001) note that the onset of anxiety or depression is predicted by a history of victimization, especially for girls.

Victims of bullying also report using prescribed, non-prescribed, and illegal substances to cope with associated traumatic effects (Rivers 2004). Peleg-Oren et al. (2012) linked the use of alcohol (within 30 days of an act of bullying) for 21% of perpetrators. In addition, Kim et al.(2011) concluded that bullying in elementary schools resulted in widespread substance abuse for a population of youth ages 11 to 21.

Non-suicidal self-injury is a phenomenon primarily associated with young adolescent females. Hilt et al. (2008) examined the psychological effects of depression related to bullying and other traumatic events that manifested in deliberate, although non-suicidal, mutilation of one's own body. They found females reported engaging in self-injurious behaviors at higher rates than their male counterparts including, but not limited to, cutting and burning themselves to feel pain or avoid punishment from others, or to get attention due to acts of bullying.

Suicidal ideation and the act of suicide itself is one of the worst outcomes of exposure to bullying. While acts of bullying have been linked to many of these incidents, Herba et al. (2008) found that other associated factors such as disruptive parental relationships and feelings of being rejected at home co-exist to form a lethal catalyst for student suicide. Hawker et al. (2000) also note that depression, anxiety, and feelings of low self-worth that often result from bullying are linked to suicide in certain combinations, but were not linked to suicide in isolation.

2.2 Teacher Perceptions of Bullying

In school environments, the students and teachers are key participants in the advancement or prevention of campus violence and school bullying (Author et al. 2004). Categorically, students are commonly identified as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders (Craig et al. 2007; Limber et al. 2018), while teachers generally are viewed as agents of social order. Hence, the actions of the faculty either protect or permit the manifestation of bullying in schools (Craig et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2011). A review of the literature reveals mixed information regarding the prevalence of bullying by school level. Physical bullying increases in elementary schools, peaks during the middle school years, and subsequently decreases during high school (Pellagrini 2001). That said, Pouwels et al. (2018) conducted a study of 2,638 students in grades 4-11 in order to examine the social status profiles of bullies by grade level. They found that, while bullying is prevalent at all levels, bullies achieve the greatest social status in high school. However, Author et al. (2004) found no statistically significant differences among the three levels of schools (elementary, middle, and high) in respect to how the faculty views student bullying and perceives teacher protection.

Within the educational setting, both teachers and administrators are expected to establish social protocols for positive engagement with all campus stakeholders and adults are primarily responsible for both preventing and intervening in social situations, which might foster bullying (Craig et al. 2007). It is obvious that teachers have the most intimate contact with students. Therefore, teachers represent an important and early line of defense against student bullying. This obligation on the part of teachers includes both intervening when behavioral expectations are lacking and reinforcing expected outcomes when they are present.

2.3 Teacher Protection of Students

On average, students spend 12-13 years of their lives in formal school settings. Thus, it is imperative that schools embrace the responsibility of providing environments that are both physically and emotionally safe (Carroll-Lind et al. 2004). However, due to the emphasis on standardized test scores, educators focus on academic needs and often overlook other aspects of the campus such as protecting students from harm (Osterman 2003).

Maslow (1954) indicates the need to feel safe is second only to physiological necessities such as breathing, nourishment, hydration, and sleep (Craig et al. 2007). Although teachers have a solid understanding of human needs, they often are more engaged in pursuing student achievement than with individual and collective aspects of student protection and safety. Notwithstanding, some teachers perceive student safety and discipline issues as administrative functions to be exclusively resolved by the principal and other administrators (Rigby 2007). Unfortunately, this lack of emphasis on matters of both discipline and campus security often give rise to one of the most pervasive threats to student safety...school bullying (Author et al. 2005; Author et al. 2017)

As research shows, knowledge of bullying must go beyond what may be revealed to teachers by their students. To that end, Mishna et al. (2006) identified various reasons why students choose not to report incidents of bullying. These reasons include: building their own coping skills such as thinking “happy thoughts” in the midst of physical victimization, fearing that the incidents would just get worse, not understanding that they are being bullied, or getting used to the treatment based upon self-blame or thinking perhaps it’s not so bad. Likewise, De Lara (2012) reported victim nondisclosure often is related to the type of bullying committed, a personal sense of helplessness, feeling shame, and not knowing how adults will react and if their reactions would be helpful or more harmful. Therefore, if bullying victims are hesitant to seek the help of the faculty, concerned teachers must be even more diligent in their attempts to recognize and protect students.

Another reason students fail to report bullying is they don’t feel adults care or are willing to intervene (Berkowitz et al. 2012; Harris et al. 2002; Isernhagen et al. 2004). Accordingly, Cassidy et al. (2012) found a group of middle school teachers to be complacent about garnering additional information regarding incidents of technology-based bullying. Conversely, Green et al. (2019) found that teachers who provide a non-punitive atmosphere to discuss bullying offer the best protection for victims. As a result of these non-threatening environments, victims are not as likely to fear additional reprisals from ‘telling’ on bullies. By utilizing interactive and non-punitive approaches, teachers can assist their campuses in addressing bullying issues by getting the perpetrator the help he or she needs.

Educators cannot be either constructive or punitive in their responses to bullying (Glasner 2010). Constructive responses include talking to the students, referring students to the counselor, and calling the victim’s parents. Punitive responses include removing the bully, levying punishment, calling the bully’s parents, and sending the bully to an administrator (Marshall et al. 2013). In addition, Osterman found that when teachers interact constructively with victimized students, they exhibit affirming behaviors, smile more, have more self-confidence, and engage more in classroom work. Victimized students also interacted more with both teachers and peers (Marshall et al, 2013). Thus, constructive and protective actions of efficacious teachers who feel they can make a difference both encourage victims and discourage perpetrators from contemplating further acts of school-based bullying.

2.4 Collective Efficacy

Bandura’s (2006) social cognition research targeting collective efficacy represents an important approach to teachers assuming active roles in addressing instances of campus bullying. Bandura (2006) asserts that although individuals make many personal decisions, their choices are not executed in isolation. Organized groups routinely work together towards accomplishing common objectives. In turn, they generate a sense of collective efficacy, recognizing that the group as a whole can achieve the goals of the organization (Bandura 1997). Accordingly, Bandura consistently identifies strong connections between groups’ beliefs (collective efficacy) and the accomplishment of salient organizational goals (Bandura 1986). Similarly, Author et al. (2002) established a statistically significant correlation between collective efficacy and academic achievement. In other words, teachers who believe they can affect academic performance through the efforts of the group manifest increased goal achievement.

Sampson (2004) examined the social and organizational characteristics of neighborhoods through the lenses of crime and collective efficacy. Sampson (2004) found high collective efficacy to be a predictor of low neighborhood crime, an interesting finding that helps inform the present investigation of teacher protection of students and student bullying. Indeed, high teacher efficacy engenders a more humanistic approach to pupil interactions (Hoy et al. 2008). This humanistic approach accentuates stakeholder intimacy and encourages autonomy, trust, and teacher oversight; social commodities not commonly associated with hostile student

environments. Likewise, efficacious teachers are more custodial in their approaches to students, believe that established goals can be achieved, and actively seek measures to ensure learning (Melnick et al. 2008). Overall, the tendency of teachers to work for the “good of the order” prompts individual efforts to congeal at the collective level and a united efficacious effort emerges in the school.

Collective efficacy has been examined in many school contexts. Sørli et al. (2011) examined collective efficacy as it relates to problem behaviors in schools. In a study of 1,100 teachers in 48 Norwegian elementary schools, they hypothesized that perceived teacher collective efficacy would emerge as a statistically significant predictor of the school culture and that, in turn, the school culture would impact student misconduct, and indeed that was the case. In other words, high perceptions of collective efficacy yielded low perceptions of problem behaviors. Thus, teachers exhibiting collectively efficacious characteristics assumed the roles of providing positive behavior supports to combat both the initiation and recurrence of inappropriate social behaviors.

Finally, group leadership also is found to impact the collective efficacy of teachers. Put simply, the collective efficacy of leaders often predicts the collective efficacy of followers. In other words, high levels of efficacy demonstrated by the school administrative team is often assumed by the teachers, which further fuels the collective performance of the faculty (Hoyt et al. 2003).

To be sure, the collective efficacy of teachers has emerged as a pervasive social attribute of high-performing schools. It is associated with high student achievement, assists in curbing behavioral problems, and increases campus awareness in positive and constructive ways. Truly, the effectiveness of collective efficacy in accomplishing organizational goals is well documented and the concept serves as a potential catalyst for moderating deleterious school problems such as student bullying.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Question and Hypotheses

This study assesses two important aspects of student bullying and the impact of the collective efficacy of teachers in light of school size and socioeconomic status. Thus, the central research question is “Does perceived collective efficacy of teachers predict the perception of bullying and teacher protection in schools?” Subsequently, we developed a set of empirically-driven hypotheses to address the central research question.

H₁: Collective efficacy, socioeconomic status, and school size will combine to provide a significant set of predictors of student bullying.

H₂: Collective efficacy will provide the best predictor of student bullying.

H₃: Collective efficacy, socioeconomic status, and school size will combine to provide a significant set of predictors of teacher protection.

H₄: Collective efficacy will emerge as the strongest predictor of teacher protection.

3.2 Sample and Data

This study employs a convenience sample. Participants within the study consisted of 1,770 faculty respondents from 108 elementary schools in Texas. A trained researcher administered the survey instrument during regularly scheduled faculty meetings. All faculty members who were present for the faculty meeting were given the opportunity to complete this survey. Faculty members who did not attend the faculty meeting were not provided with a subsequent opportunity to complete the survey. An average of 17 faculty members responded to the survey per campus, for an average response rate of 33%. Care was taken to select urban, suburban, and rural schools from the southwestern part of the state. Grade span levels included grades Prekindergarten through grade 5.

Schools in the sample represented the entire range of socioeconomic status (SES); in fact, data from the Texas Education Agency support the representativeness of this sample of elementary schools in terms of size, SES, and urban-rural balance. The smallest school in the study had 378 students and the largest had 1,087 students. The mean school size for the sample was 667 students. This investigation employed student eligibility for the federal free and reduced meal program as a surrogate for SES. The wealthiest school in the study had 3% of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, while the poorest school in the study had 99.8% who qualified. The elementary schools participating in his study had an average of 56.82% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (See Table 1). Teachers in the schools were representative of a diverse group in age, race, gender,

experience and educational level according to the teacher data section of the Texas Education Agency (2006) Academic Excellence Indicator System Report (AEIS) for each school.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Collective Efficacy	4.507	.495
Student Bullying	2.317	.517
Teacher Protection	5.076	.330
School Size	667.611	158.177
SES	56.837	28.158

3.3 Research Instruments

In order to test the hypotheses, operational measures of bullying and collective efficacy were required. The Bully Scale, developed by Author et al. (2004), is utilized to operationalize the construct of student bullying. The Bully Index was created as a means of analyzing the nature and meaning of bullying in schools. The initial exploratory factor analysis of this instrument yielded two rather distinct aspects of bullying--teachers' description of student bullying and their attempt to protect students from intimidation and harm (Author et al., 2004). The instrument consists of 14 Likert-type items that measure these two dimensions of student bullying on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree (1)” to “strongly agree” (6) (See Appendix 1).

The Collective Efficacy Scale – Short Version (Goddard, 2002) also was used in this study to examine perceptions of collective efficacy. The scale is composed of 12 Likert-type items. Teachers describe the extent of their agreement with each item from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6) along a six-point scale(See Appendix 2). Chronbach’s alpha coefficients of reliability for the Collective Efficacy Scale are typically in the .90s (Goddard, 2002). Confirmatory factor analyses were run on the Collective Efficacy Scale – Short Version in order to confirm its construct validity as well.

3.4 Data analyses

The independent variable (collective efficacy) and the dependent variables (student bullying, teacher protection, socioeconomic status and school size) were analyzed to determine responses and outcomes for the empirical hypotheses. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to ensure no anomalies exist that would preclude further analysis. Next, confirmatory factor analyses were performed in order to confirm the construct validity of the Bully Index and the Collective Efficacy Scale-Short version. Then, correlational analyses were performed to determine relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Finally, multiple regression analysis was employed to extrapolate a more refined picture of the relationships. In order to examine the impact of each of the independent variables, regression analyses were run using simultaneous data entry.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics revealed no anomalies in the data. Strong factor loadings confirmed the construct validity of the Bully Index. The 14 items loaded into two factors, with robust Cronbach alpha levels of reliability: student bullying (.885) and teacher protection (.721). These results, which are consistent with results found in previous studies, support the construct validity of the Bully Index (Author et al., 2004; Author, et al., 2005). The reliability coefficient for the 12 item Collective Efficacy Scale was similarly strong, with an alpha coefficient of .96.

It was assumed that the dimensions of school bullying would be related to aspects of collective efficacy and indeed this was the case. Student bullying and teacher protection were related to collective efficacy and the demographic variables of SES and school size. Student bullying ($r = -.859^{**}$, $p < .01$), teacher protection ($r = .751^{**}$, $p < .01$), SES ($r = -.835^{**}$, $p < .01$), and school size ($r = .477^{**}$, $p < .01$) were statistically and significantly related to collective efficacy. The demographic variable, SES was statistically and significantly related to student bullying ($r = .641^{**}$, $p < .01$), teacher protection ($r = .537$, $p < .01$), and school size ($r = -.502^{**}$, $p < .01$). Further, school size was statistically and significantly related to student bullying ($r = -.355$, $p < .01$), teacher protection ($r = .322$, $p < .01$), and SES ($r = -.502^{**}$, $p < .01$)(See Table 2).

Table 2

Correlational Analysis of the Study Variables (N=108)

	Collective efficacy	Student bullying	Teacher protection	SES	School size
Collective efficacy		-.859**	.751**	-.835**	.477**
Student bullying			-.762**	.641**	-.355**
Teacher protection				.537**	.322**
SES					-.502**

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Multiple regression analyses provided a more refined picture of the aspects of school bullying, collective efficacy, SES, and school size. As predicted, the analysis of the data supported both Hypotheses 1 (Adjusted R Square = .503) and 3 (Adjusted R Square = .315). Hypothesis 2 was not supported as SES ($\beta = .419, p < .05$) proved to be the strongest predictor of student bullying. However, the effect of collective efficacy ($\beta = -.395, p < .05$), which was also identified as a statistically significant predictor of student bullying was nearly as robust as that of SES. Moreover, Hypothesis 4 was supported as collective efficacy ($\beta = .413, p < .05$) emerged as the sole predictor of teacher protection (See Table 3).

Table 3

Multiple Regression of Student Bullying and Teacher Protection

Standard coefficients (Beta)	Student bullying		Teacher Protection	
	<i>r</i>	Beta	<i>r</i>	Beta
Collective efficacy	-.859**	-.395**	.751**	.413**
SES	-.502**	.419**	-.537**	-.238
School size	-.355**	.151	.322**	-.130
<i>R</i> = .719	<i>R</i> = .578		Adjusted R	
	Adjusted R Square = .503		Adjusted R Square = .315	

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$

5. Discussion

5.1 Collective Efficacy and Student Bullying

Students and teachers are key stakeholders in the perpetration or prevention of campus violence and bullying (Author et al. 2004). This postulate drove our need to investigate how the collective efficacy of teachers might predict both teacher protection and student bullying. Our discussion now turns to an examination of collective efficacy in respect to student bullying.

Managing student behavior is essential to providing an effective instructional environment. Williams et al. (2011) explored the relationship between student perceptions of collective efficacy and bullying perpetration. They found that increases in individual student perceptions of collective efficacy significantly and negatively predicted

the frequency of self-reported bullying incidents. In a similar vein, Sørli et al. (2011) explored the relationship between teacher collective efficacy and problem behaviors in schools. They also discovered an inverse relationship between collective efficacy and such behaviors.

Our research builds on the work of Williams et al. (2011) and Sørli et al. (2011), by specifically examining collective teacher perceptions in respect to student bullying. Expectations were that collective efficacy would combine with SES and school size to provide a significant set of predictors of student bullying and indeed that was the case. Student bullying ($r = -.859^{**}$, $p < .01$) was statistically and significantly related to collective efficacy. It is important to examine these results for potential collinearity. The highest correlation resides between student bullying and collective efficacy. This is a negative correlation, meaning that the higher the level of faculty collective efficacy, the lower the level of student bullying is perceived on campus. It was therefore concluded the concepts being measured are distinct. Both SES and school size were also expected to contribute to the predictable strength of this combination. In fact, the data demonstrated that a linear combination of collective efficacy, SES, and school size explained a significant portion of the variance in student bullying ($R = .719$, $p < .01$, with an adjusted R Square of .503); that is, the independent variables explained 50% of the variance in student bullying. It was also hypothesized that collective efficacy would be the best predictor of student bullying and the analysis revealed that it was a strong indicator ($\beta = -.395$, $p < .01$). However, SES also emerged as a slightly more robust predictor of collective efficacy ($\beta = .419$, $p < .01$).

In previous research, studies of the relationship between bullying and SES have uncovered a greater frequency of bullying in lower SES backgrounds. For example, Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2009) identified greater levels of bullying in schools with high percentages of students from low SES families and communities. Similarly in our study, we found higher levels of bullying ($r = .641$, $p < .01$) and lower levels of collective efficacy ($r = -.835$, $p < .01$) in high poverty schools.

As a construct, collective efficacy represents the general belief that the collective actions of teachers can make a positive difference. This is predicated on previous successes and other factors. Conversely, teachers who are convinced that obstacles are greater than their collective ability to overcome the barriers experience lower levels of collective efficacy. In turn, their perceptions of concerns may be greater than they actually are. In brief, our analyses indicate that collective efficacy can be a potent catalyst for moderating student bullying in schools.

5.2 Collective Efficacy and Teacher Protection

Although some teachers feel the primary responsibility for securing safe learning environments lies with students or their parents, the general public views the faculty as agents of social order in schools (Osterman 2003). Both legislators and the local communities-at-large believe teacher actions either protect or permit bullying in schools (Craig et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2011). To that end, victim and perpetrator perspectives of 1,182, eighth and 10th graders were examined in a study involving Israeli schools. Gofin et al. (2002) found that 57.1% of boys and 27.0% of girls were bullied due to a lack of teacher support. Thus, teacher ambivalence towards student conduct and their apparent ambiguity related to student protection proved to be key antecedents of the research.

The analysis of the data in our present investigation produced a positive relationship between teacher protection and collective efficacy ($r = .751^{**}$, $p < .01$). This finding supports Hypothesis 3. In essence, a greater degree of perceived teacher protection existed in the presence of strong teacher collective efficacy. The perceptions held by teachers that they collectively work together to have a positive effect on students and are “up to that task” results in their conviction that when the need arises they will act according to this belief. Therefore, we posit that a highly efficacious faculty is both more connected to the school social milieu and convinced that they can make a difference in protecting students from bullying.

In general, collective efficacy, SES, and school size formed a linear combination that explained a significant portion of the variance in teacher protection ($R = .578$, with an adjusted R Square of .315). Thus, collective efficacy, SES, and school size explained 32% of the variance in teacher protection. Furthermore, Hypothesis 4 was supported in that collective efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of teacher protection ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$). In fact, collective efficacy was the only variable that proved to be a statistically significant predictor of teacher protection. Given the results, our analyses point to the fact that the level of collective efficacy of the teachers represents a critical property regarding how the faculty will act to protect students in the face of bullying.

Although we discovered that SES is a slightly more robust predictor of student bullying, it does not affect teachers protecting students from bullying. In sum, our research suggests that faculties with high levels of collective efficacy engage with students, are involved and proactive on the campus, and take ownership of their responsibility to reduce incidents of bullying.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

The following practical recommendations are provided for school leaders who are interested in improving faculty collective efficacy to help mitigate school bullying:

- 1) Create a common language to ensure that all faculty members understand how bullying is defined;
- 2) Instruct teachers regarding the complexities associated with the reach of school bullying from the schoolyard to the cyber world;
- 3) Ensure teachers have a common understanding of the various roles associated with bullying situations including: bullies, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders;
- 4) Clarify to teachers their roles as proactive protectors in respect to both overt and covert forms of bullying and
- 5) Provide training in how to identify and respond to potential incidents of bullying

5.4 Limitations and Next Steps

The purpose of this study was to add to the extant literature on bullying and collective efficacy. Like all studies, it is limited by its design and scope. In short there are many questions that remain unanswered. For example, it may be beneficial for future studies to explore whether and to what extent other variables such as gender, race, and parental relationship impact bullying and collective efficacy. It may also be beneficial to further study how teachers respond to overt and covert forms of bullying. In short, the authors recognize that this study is but one of many future studies that are needed in order to develop a clearer picture of school bullying and the role that teacher collective efficacy may play in helping to mitigate bullying on school campuses.

6. Conclusion

Student safety constitutes a moral imperative and represents a precursor to effective learning environments. Professional educators consistently face campus forces that moderate successful learning, including student safety. As school responsibilities related to both social and academic achievement continue to grow, developing an atmosphere of safety in schools is paramount. To that end, our work veneers the extant literature on bullying and collective efficacy; two important social processes that affect the learning environments of schools. The investigation provides practical means for addressing bullying behaviors by encouraging school organizations to focus on the problem and incorporate solutions through collectively efficacious actions of the faculty. Our research demonstrates the utility of the bully scale and the collective efficacy scale to provide school leaders with information about the organizational milieu that impacts both safety and academic growth. Our investigation also demonstrates that collective efficacy, a potent catalyst available to campus leaders, is an important property influencing how teachers will act in the face of bullying. In addition, our research further identifies an efficacious faculty as one that can make a difference in protecting students. Such faculties engage with students, are actively involved in the educational milieu, possess a “can do” attitude, and take ownership of their responsibilities to reduce incidents of bullying to promote unmolested organizational opportunities for learning.

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APPENDIX A: BULLY SCALE

SUBSETS OF THE CONSTRUCTS OF SCHOOL BULLYING

Student Bullying Subset (Alpha .96)

- Students threaten other students in this school.
- Bullying students is commonplace in this school.
- Student ruffians in this school intimidate other students.
- Students in this school threaten others with physical harm.
- In this school, there are too many student thugs.
- Rowdy student behavior is common in this school.
- Students in this school fear other students.
- Students in this school make fun of other students.

Teacher Protection Subset (Alpha .73)

- In this school, teachers try to protect students who are different.
- Teachers in this school do not get involved in student bullying.
- In this school, teachers are vigilant about student bullying.
- Teachers in this school reach out to help students who are harassed by other students.
- Teachers are not afraid to stop student arguments or fighting.
- In this school, students intimidating other students are not permitted.

APPENDIX B: COLLECTIVE EFFICACY SCALE—SHORT FORM

Collective Efficacy Scale—Short Form(Alpha .96)

- The amount a student can learn is primarily related to student background.
- Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.
- If a child doesn't want to learn teachers here give up.
- Teachers here don't have the skills needed to produce meaningful learning.
- Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn.
- These students come to school ready to learn.
- Home life provides so many advantages that students here are bound to learn.
- Students here just aren't motivated to learn
- Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems.
- The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn.
- Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.
- Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here.