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HOW TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING RELATE TO HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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ABSTRACT

HOW TRADITIONAL BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING RELATE TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

Thomas Sposato



This study examined the frequency and possible connection between student self-reported bullying victimization, suicidal ideation, and reported fear of attending school. These school and societal problems have potential negative impacts on individuals, families, and school learning communities. Their negative effects may be compounded when occurring together. Previous research has connected bullying behavior to student absenteeism to suicidal ideation. These connections were further explored in this study using the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), which is overseen by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The purpose of this survey is to focus on illness, death, and disability among adolescents, and what may be contributing factors to these unfortunate outcomes. New within this research was the exploration of whether students who report victimization from bullying and are seriously consider attempting suicide are more or less likely to not attend school due to fear. In all, a nationally representative sample of 13,677 students' survey results were analyzed in this study.

The first research question examined the relationship between the independent variables of missing school due to fear, cyber-bullying alone, traditional bullying alone, and both forms of bullying at school with the dependent variable reported thoughts of suicide. Students reporting school bullying alone were 2.2 times more likely to report suicidal ideation than students reporting no bullying. Students experiencing

cyberbullying alone were 1.6 times more likely to report suicidal ideation than students reporting no bullying. Both forms of bullying for students led to a 3.7 times greater likelihood to also report suicidal ideation. In terms of days absent from school due to fear, those students were 1.5 times more likely to consider suicide.

The second research question analyzed the relationship between the independent variables traditional bullying alone, cyberbullying alone, both forms of bullying at school, and considered suicide with the dependent variable of being absent due to fear of attending school. The addition of bullying in school alone to the prediction of days absent led to a statistically significant increase. With the addition of cyber bullying alone to the prediction of days absent, this did not lead to a statistically significant increase. When both forms of bullying (in school and online) were added, this did lead to a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of missing school due to fear. Finally, layering in considered suicide also increased the prediction of days absent from school with statistical significance.

Suicidal attempts, under the umbrella of self-injurious behavior, are a behavior. And just like any observable behavior, there can be one and/or multiple functions (e.g., escape, attention seeking, etc.). The fields of suicide prevention, anti-bullying campaigns, and student absenteeism mitigation are complex; however, this research hopefully sheds a small, yet potentially significant light on all such prevention efforts by school and mental health professionals.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Adolescents often have to navigate complex social and academic platforms at school that can be further challenged by their mental health. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2017 20 percent of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school during the school year and 15 percent of students in grades 9-12 reported being victims of electronic bullying (within the school day hours) during the past year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) defines bullying as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance”. Electronic bullying or cyberbullying is then defined as bullying that occurs through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media. Six percent of students in 2017 thought that someone might attack or harm them, and reported avoiding school activities, classes, or locations within school during the previous school year as a result of this fear. This was a one percent increase from 2015. Data from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Center for Health Statistic (NCHS) indicate that suicide was the second leading cause of death for persons aged 10–14, 15–19, and 20-24 in 2017 (Curtin, 2019). The NVSS 2017 national data also indicate that among persons aged 10-24 there was some stability of suicide rates between 2000 and 2007, however there was a sharp increase of 56% (6.8 per 100,000) between 2007 and 2017 (Curtin, 2019).

Previous research has connected these alarming statistics to a variety of negative outcomes. Beran and Li (2007) examined both traditional and cyberbullying and found that students who were bullied electronically only, and students bullied both

electronically and at school, experienced difficulties at school such as low grades, poor concentration, and absenteeism. Traditional bullying and electronic bullying are each associated with increased odds of missing school due to safety concerns compared to no bullying victimization (Steiner & Rasberry, 2015). Cyberbullying has a strong relationship with all suicidal behaviors in a previous study documenting an increase of suicidal thoughts by 14.5 percentage points and suicide attempts by 8.7 percentage points (Nikolaou, 2017). Suicidal ideation, student absenteeism due to fear, and bullying are the central foci of this study.

Purpose of the Study

This study builds off of previous studies and examines whether suicidal ideation and student absenteeism impact one another in a significant manner, and if bullying compounds any significant effects. If students miss school due to fear, do those absences mitigate any continued effect of previous bullying incidences on suicidal ideation? Is a student more likely to exhibit a fear of attending school if they are bullied in any form and also have considered suicide?

Previous studies have explored the relationship between bullying and these outcomes, but it is important to use more recent data and additional control variables to understand the nature of the ongoing problem. This is especially important as cyberbullying becomes a greater factor in the life of adolescents. In a study of the 2013 YRBS, researchers found a statistically significant association between both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying, alone and in combination, with the increased likelihood of missing school (Steiner & Rasberry, 2015). Baiden and Tadeo (2020) also analyzed the 2017 YRBS and found that 9.1% of students reported being a victim of both traditional

and cyber-bullying. Students who were a recipient of both forms of bullying had a 3.26 times higher rate of suicidal ideation, those who experienced only traditional bullying faced a 2.15 times higher rate of suicidal ideation, and those adolescents who experience cyber-bullying alone had exactly a 2 times higher rate of suicidal ideation (Baiden & Tadeo, 2020). Baiden and Tadeo (2020) did account for other factors such as forced sexual intercourse, depressive symptoms, cigarette smoking, alcohol use, cannabis use, and illicit drug use.

The present study contributes to the ongoing efforts to better understand and prevent bullying, student absenteeism, and suicidal ideation that influence educational and social and emotional outcomes for students that ultimately affect us all in some capacity. Students will most likely miss school due to fear, especially if bullied. Those students that are bullied, however, if they also have suicidal ideation, are they more likely to miss school? This study used the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to answer these questions and to examine the relationship between bullying and student absenteeism and suicidal ideation.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study draws on two theoretical frameworks: Social Dominance Theory (SDT) and the Stress Process Model (SPM). Evans and Smokowski (2015) examined theoretical explanations for bullying in school. One of the more significant theories examined was SDT first proposed by Sidanius and Pratto (1999). SDT has been used in many studies of school bullying including Bibou-Nakou et al. (2012), Evans and Smokowski (2016), and Goodboy et al. (2016). SDT essentially argues that all societies are composed of group-based social hierarchies that are based on more concrete factors

(e.g., age or gender) and also arbitrary-set systems (e.g., ethnicity or social class).

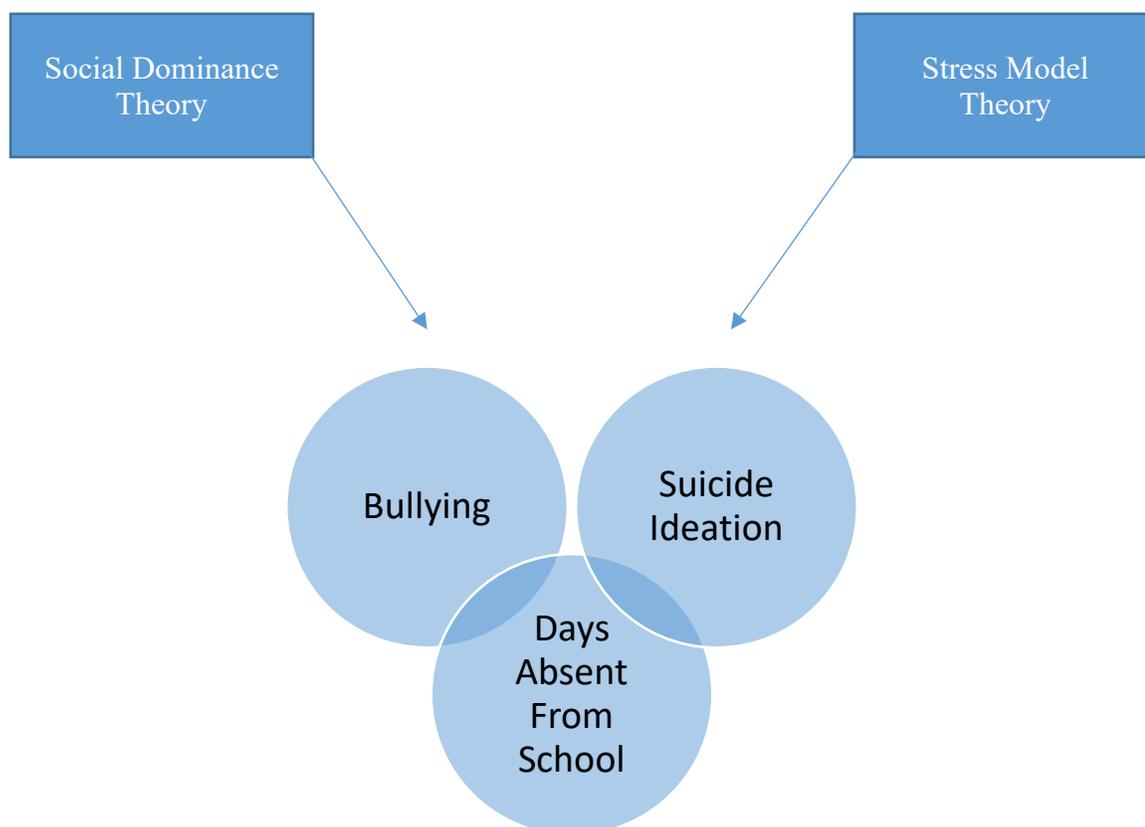
Oppression, discrimination, and injustices are the primary mechanisms to form and maintain these hierarchies. The dominant group(s) obtain greater social, materialistic, and symbolic value as compared to the subordinate groups. Bullying behavior can be fueled most significantly by the desire for power and dominance through the mechanism of intimidation and humiliation (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). Ongoing bullying can be perpetrated as a means of maintained social dominance. With SDT, social status and power in each individual are not a result of individual characteristics, but rather derived from group membership. This may explain why peer observers of bullying behavior may not report or intervene with active bullying; even though they are not the perpetrators directly of bullying behavior, they may benefit from the observation and not reporting nor intervening as now being part of the bullying group and receiving social status rewards as a result. The social status benefit can be evident both online and in person at school.

The Stress Process Model (SPM) proposes that negative physical and mental health outcomes likelihood are increased by exposure to life stressors (Pearlin, 1989). SPM has three essential components, stressors (e.g., neighborhood crime and disadvantaged social status), mediators (e.g., social support) and negative health outcomes. Based on SPM, bullying victimization is conceptualized as a stressful life event that can increase the risk for suicidal ideation (Baiden & Tadeo, 2020). While SDT gives this research insight into the why of bullying, SPM helps frame the consequences of such behavior. This framework served as the foundation for Baiden and Tadeo's study of the 2017 YRBS, discussed above.

The conceptual framework of the proposed study examines how bullying victimization drives fear and alienation. As a result, fear of attending in person school and/or online forums relating to school functions (student absenteeism) may also be perpetuated by suicidal ideation. The intersection of SPM and SDT provide the foundation for this analysis. The covariates there were included in the analyses also fit into this theoretical framework. For example, sexual orientation can be a contributing factor in the three negative outcomes within the main analysis. A student that identifies with a sexual orientation that is not in the majority may experience more stress than the average student due to potential bias and prejudice or additional bullying that student may receive.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



Significance/Importance of the Study

According to the CDC (2018) close to 45,000 people (ages 10 and up) lost their lives to suicide in 2016. Since 1999, we have seen more than a 30% increase in suicide rates in half of states across the United States. Of those people who have died by suicide in 2016, 54% did not have a known mental health condition. The CDC has also reaffirmed that suicide in the United States among adolescents is the second leading cause of death. More alarming, specific to adolescents and young adults (age 10-24), the rate of suicide increased by close to 60% between 2007 and 2018, according to the CDC. The impact of COVID-19, in particular school closings, remote learning, and quarantines, may contribute further to feelings of alienation in current times. Student absenteeism and suicidal ideation in students returning from long term school absences and/or remote learning situations makes this study more relevant, to get a stronger sense of these issues prior to the current pandemic to then replicate this study during or after the pandemic.

Treating and preventing the second leading cause of death among adolescents is not an easy feat, as evidenced by the numbers slowly climbing over the years since 1999. However, each piece of research that can contribute another beacon of light can help perhaps even just one individual. Since the majority of individuals who die by suicide did not have a known mental health condition, researchers over the years have been identifying other factors that can serve as warning signs to help fuel prevention efforts. This study examined adolescents in school that are bullied, and also report a fear of coming to school, in conjunction with suicidal ideation.

This study is connected directly to and inspired by the Vincentian Mission, as a driving force of St. John's University. This mission encourages us to research causes of

social injustice and to seek solutions. Ensuring students to feel safe to come to and from school and are not threatened and bullied by peers is imperative to their learning and social emotional well-being. It also aligns very well to the spirit of compassion and concern for others that is an essential characteristic of St. Vincent de Paul.

Exploring the possible predictors of suicidal ideation can assist professionals in better preparing proactive programs to not only reduce bullying behavior but also to mitigate its impact if still occurring, on the youth of our schools. The results of this study could also assist proactive programs in reducing student absenteeism.

Is the student that is bullied and also having feelings of suicide more likely to miss school? If that answer is yes, school policy can focus on addressing the bullying and absenteeism behavior by periodically reviewing both behavioral and attendance student data to try to identify trends. If the answer is no, and a student that is bullied that stays home from school is the same or less likely to experience suicidal ideation, those issues still need to be addressed. Student absenteeism has other negative consequences for a student. However, the approach of the school in both a proactive and reactive manner to address bullying and absenteeism, perhaps, might be slightly different if suicidal ideation is the same or less likely to be a factor.

Research Questions

- Is there a statistically significant relationship between the independent variables of missing school due to fear, cyber-bullying alone, traditional bullying alone, and both forms of bullying at school with the dependent variable reported thoughts of suicide?

- Is there a statistically significant association between the independent variables traditional bullying alone, cyberbullying alone, both forms of bullying at school, and considered suicide with the dependent variable of being absent due to fear of attending school?

Data and Methods

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to understand factors that contribute to illness, death, and disability among adolescents. It provides data representative of students in both public and private schools in the United States grades 9 through 12. The YRBS was first developed in 1990 to examine leading causes of death, disability, and social issues among youth in the United States and to monitor health behaviors that may be contributing factors (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2019). For the 2019 YRBS, 78 total survey sites were utilized to administer the YRBS to high school student populations across the United States (national and 44 states, 28 local school districts, 136 schools, three territories, and two tribal governments). This national YRBS data was collected during the time period of August 2018–June 2019.

A binary logistic regression was used to predict if students reported thoughts of suicide as influenced by all forms of bullying as mentioned and days absent from school due to fear. A step wise regression was used to predict days absent from school given both independent variables bullying in school/electronic bullying and thoughts of suicide. Covariates that were included in both analyses include grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, cigarette use, alcohol use, marijuana use, and sexual identify. Absenteeism, for the purposes of this study, is defined as 0 days absent, 1 day absent, 2-3 days absent, 4-5

days, or 6 or more days of school missed because a student felt they would be unsafe at school or on the way to or from school.

Definition of Terms

Olweus and Limber (2010) provides a slightly refined definition of bullying or victimization in terms of being bullied, intimidated, or victimized with specification and duration both in mind. When a person is a recipient of negative actions or behaviors from a more powerful peer repeatedly over time, this is bullying. These behaviors can be varied, including teasing, physical abuse, withholding of attention or personal items, or exclusion from social activities. An individual can either be a person that has been bullied, or a bully-victim, which is defined as a person that is bullied and also perpetrates bullying behavior towards another (Sigurdson et al., 2014).

Then there are those peers that witness bullying behavior, whether in person or online. Benzmilller (2013) identified several studies that indicate most bullying behaviors are witnessed by bystanders. Bystanders can either be merely passive observers, those that encourage the bullying by providing attention or encouragement, or those than join the harassment (Benzmilller, 2013). In either of these scenarios, the bystander becomes part of the bullying dynamic. In terms of at-school bullying, “at school” is defined as within the school building, on school property, or on a school bus going to and from school.

Baiden and Tadeo (2020), in review of previous research by Bridge, Goldstein, and Brent (2006) and Nock & Favazza (2009), helped define suicidal behavior and ideation. It is critical to understand and apply appropriately the different terms within this chronic societal problem, as they can be key in prevention. There are differences.

Suicidal behavior is defined as “any behavior engaged in with the intent to die and consists of suicidal ideation, a suicide plan, suicide attempts, and death by suicide” (Baiden & Tadeo, 2020, p. 1). Suicidal ideation refers to the thought domain only, possessing the ideas or thoughts of engaging in a behavior with the purpose of killing oneself. A person with a suicide plan takes this to another level, now with a specific and formulated plan of action to end one’s life. A suicide attempt is when an individual engages in a potentially self-injurious behavior with the intention of death by suicide. Self-injurious behavior by an individual without that intent to die is not considered a suicide attempt, but obviously still a concerning behavior.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

The complex social dynamic known as bullying can be best understood using multiple theoretical frameworks (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). Social Dominance Theory may explain the majority of this phenomenon, however, other theories will be also reviewed, to assist connecting to school attendance and suicidal ideation theories. Social relationships can provide resources and other benefits to individuals. Social Capital Theory (SCT) describes the investment process of a social relationship, and how these resources and benefits are accessed. SCT, as applied to the school setting, can include students' attitudes towards school belonging and school attachment. Social Capital Theory falls under the umbrella of SDT and further sheds light on the reasons why bullying behavior might be initiated and sustained. Social Dominance Theory was again, an integral part of the research by Bibou-Nakou and colleagues (2012).

Social ties can bond social capital between similar individuals in a particular peer group. This socialization within the similar group can increase a sense of belonging and strengthen the overall group's cohesiveness. Social ties can also bridge to those outside of a particular peer group, looking at a wider social network. These experiences can provide resources and status that might not otherwise be available if the socialization remained solely within the main group. In addition, the desired feeling of dominance of the bully, Evans and Smokowski (2016) explain well with Social Dominance Theory as also fueled by SCT. The bully uses "bullying as a means of obtaining and protecting social capital, which fuels their power and gives them the resources to continue bullying and acquiring additional social capital" (p. 373).

Victims of bullying may not have the same social capital in order to escape the cycle of bullying behavior. Although the bully may not be liked by peers, the gains of the observer peers who may not participate directly in the bullying, but encourage it by not condoning it, perpetuate the behavior. The attention gained by the bully, of course, is not the only way to obtain social capital. The social capital gains achieved by the bully can backfire on the individual if the bullying behavior may be too extreme for the peer observers. This concept can be useful in trying to rehabilitate the habitual bully.

Victims of bullying may turn to healthy and appropriate ways of building their own social capital (e.g., connecting with a club or demonstrating skills and strengths that others in the peer group may benefit from). Social Dominance Theory does not always lead to undesirable outcomes. The victims, however, can also turn to negative means of ending the bullying. Bully victims may turn to bullying others, as a perceived sole means in acquiring their own social capital and status. Bullying or aggression towards others may not be a choice an individual is able or willing to make. Potentially in that scenario, that aggression or desire for social capital can be turned inward (Langille et al., 2012). If a student lacks social capital and is not feeling any dominance in the social domain, attention from peers and family can be obtained by other means that potentially can be self-destructive.

Self-injury can include attempts or completion of suicide, but also describes a continuum of behavior that includes nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI). Guan, Fox, and Prinstein (2012) examined this area, defining NSSI as a direct and deliberate act that causes self-injury to one's own body, without intent to die (and is not socially sanctioned). Victims of bullying may avoid school out of fear, and may turn to self-

injury, in any of its forms, in an unhealthy attempt to obtain social capital (e.g., through school support staff interventions to assist) and to end a cycle of bullying. The intersection of self-injurious behavior, bullying behavior, and student absenteeism has been established in prior research as the following section will illuminate.

Review of Related Literature

The negative effects and known predictors of student absenteeism, bullying, and suicidal ideation are discussed in this section. The importance within the field of education to focus on these issues will be highlighted, including mention of preventative efforts. The effects of suicide on the individual and surrounding peers and family might seem obvious, but it is important to review the overarching theme of suicide and self-injurious behavior as those relevant effects might interact with those involving student absenteeism and bullying behavior. If students that are bullied and report suicidal ideation are more likely to not attend school due to fear, then this research potentially can assist future research and current educators and mental health professionals in better identifying students in need of support and intervention.

Student Absenteeism

Increasingly, educational policies are focusing on reducing student absenteeism. In 2015, the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) attempted to support schools nationwide in looking at the whole child and requiring reporting on more varied nontraditional measures of student progress. One of these areas for support is student absenteeism.

García and Weiss (2018) reported on two essential issues of which students are missing school and the impact on student performance as a result of student absenteeism.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 2015 was analyzed, finding that approximately one in five students missed three days of school or more in the month prior to the administration of the NAEP mathematics assessment. There were several groups of students that were more likely to have missed school, including students with disabilities, students eligible for free lunch, Hispanic English Language Learners, and Native American students (García & Weiss, 2018). Their further analysis did conclude that test scores on the NAEP mathematics test were between 0.3 and 0.6 standard deviations lower among 8th grade students who missed three or more days of school within that prior month. Therefore, attendance clearly correlates with academic performance.

In addition to impacting test scores, prior research has also concluded that students who are chronically absent are also at significant risk for other negative outcomes. For example, chronically absent students have been found to have lower grades, more behavioral issues, and higher drop-out rates (Gottfried & Ehrlich, 2018). Gottfried (2014) had also established an emotional impact of student absenteeism in the study from 2014, even with younger children. In this study, Gottfried utilized data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011). This included achievement data and surveys of teachers and parents, with a diversity of school types, socioeconomic levels, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. The sample size for purposes of this study was 10,740 students. This data set contains a large span of covariates as control measures, in the following categories: student measures (e.g., gender and race) and family measures (e.g., SES and family involvement). Socioemotional skills were obtained from six socioemotional scales (four social-skills

scales and two problem-behaviors scales). These scales are derived from teachers' assessment in both fall and spring of the same year. In terms of socioemotional skills, Gottfried found that "being a chronic absentee was also associated with a decline in educational engagement (as measured by approaches to learning and eagerness to learn) as well as a decline in social engagement as measured by an increase in internalizing behaviors" (Gottfried, 2014, p. 70). Many external factors may influence absenteeism, but some antecedents such as bullying are within the school's control.

One particular group, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students, routinely report missing school more frequently as compared to heterosexual students but that gap has been on the decline in recent years (Olsen et al., 2017). Olsen et al. (2017) looked at 11 Youth Risk Behavior Surveys for grades 9 through 12 in Massachusetts during 1995 to 2015. These researchers found a steady decline among all students based on sexual preference/identify. During this 20-year period, students that identified as heterosexual reduced their absenteeism rate from 4.3% to 3.8%. Students that identified as LGB decreased their absenteeism rate from 25.0% to 13.4%. Although Olsen et al. (2017) found this decrease to be for both heterosexual and LGB students, there is still a disparity in the last data point from 2015, in that 13.4% of LGB students were still reporting missing school due to fear, as compared to 3.8% of heterosexual students. Sexual preference may still be a factor in relation to student absenteeism, even though the rate of absenteeism may have decreased over time.

In 2020, Gath et al. performed an integrated literature review of the relationship between school absenteeism and substance use (alcohol, cigarette use, marijuana, and other drugs). The specific research question asked, "what does research reveal about the

relationship between school absenteeism and use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs among U.S. high school students” (Gakh et al., 2020, p. 492)? The researchers conducted a detailed search of peer-reviewed literature in the health and education areas, utilizing PubMed, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Full-Text, Scopus and Web of Science. Overall, 37 studies meeting the researchers’ inclusion criteria remained for the data extraction and quality assessment analysis.

Increased risk of abusing substances also includes marijuana. Chronic absenteeism was found to increase the risk both of initiating and continuing use of marijuana. Students that were chronically absent from school are more likely to either begin using marijuana, or if they were already using marijuana prior, they were more likely to continue its use. Marijuana consumption, reciprocally, found that students who used marijuana had increased odds of absenteeism from school (Maynard et al., 2017; Roebuck et al., 2004). Gakh et al., in terms of cigarette use, found seven research studies that connected student absenteeism to both early and late onset cigarette use. However, only one study (Feemster et al., 2016), connected the reverse relationship, finding that 25% of student cigarette users missed 3 or more days of school as compared to 3.8% for students that never smoked cigarettes. In terms of alcohol use and student absenteeism, Maynard et al. (2017) found a statistical significance between alcohol use along with binge drinking and increased odds of missing school. Now that I have clearly demonstrated the importance of absenteeism and some antecedents, it is important to focus on one of the main antecedents, specifically bullying. Bullying behavior also has negative consequences on other facets of the well-being of a student.

Bullying

Bullying has been found to have several negative effects on teenagers. For example, Schneider et al. (2012) examined data from a regional census of high school students from 2008. This data set included 20,406 students grades 9-12 in MetroWest Massachusetts and their completed surveys ascertaining their bullying victimization and psychological distress. Psychological distress can include depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality. The researchers found that 15.8% of students reported cyberbullying and 25.9% of students reported school bullying incidences within the past 12 months prior to the survey. The analysis showed a strong overlap between the two forms of bullying, with 59.7% of cyberbullying victims also reporting school bullying, and 36.3% of school bullying victims also reporting cyberbullying. The findings indicated significant connections between both forms of bullying and psychological distress. Both groups indicated an overall elevated psychological distress compared to peers who did not experience any form of bullying. Victims of cyberbullying alone exhibited more psychological distress than school bullying alone. Victims of both forms of bullying were four times as likely to experience symptoms of depression and five times as likely to attempt suicide compared to non-victims (Schneider et al., 2012).

Researchers have found a relationship between bullying and attendance. Steiner and Rasberry (2015) furthered the conversation about bullying and health risk behaviors, which already have been well-documented, to now include school attendance as a factor. Associations between in-person bullying and cyberbullying with student absenteeism due to related safety concerns were examined through the analysis of data from the 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey of students in grades 9-12. This study identified

that over a quarter of students experienced bullying within the past year. Of those bullied, a logistic regression analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between the days missed of school because of safety concerns between the two groups of students. Among those students that experienced bullying, 15.9% of school days were missed during a 30 day time sample, as compared to 4.1% of days missed who were not bullied (Steiner & Rasberry, 2015).

The statistics gained from student surveys are important to review and consider, as well as other data sources need to be referenced as well, to further explore the voice of the student. The student's voice can not only be helpful, but also required in certain instances such as those relating to basic human rights. Principles embedded within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, require young people to be consulted with when issues are concerning them, which applies to areas of research as well. Dennehy et al. (2019) presented a theoretical problem on just this point; the study was a rights-based collaboration with young people as coresearchers focusing on cyberbullying, through a qualitative methodology. As active participants in the research design and implantation process, students were able to form, express, and interpret other's views on cyberbullying.

The student participant researchers, during the 2016-17 school year, were selected from four large town high schools in the Republic of Ireland. Students were selected on a voluntary basis to form an advisory group, including ten female and six male students, all 16 years of age. Focus groups were the main data collection method. The youth researchers with adult facilitation, considered various approaches to collecting qualitative

data from the students at their schools. Focus groups were selected as the team felt they would be less intimidating than one to one interview sessions.

The adult researchers met with the 16 youth researchers on five occasions to build the young people's capacity to assist in the qualitative study's design, engage with the research, interpret findings, and evaluate the overall collaboration process. A topic guide was utilized specific to discussing cyberbullying with young people, to help inform discussion topics. This topic guide included defining cyberbullying, behaviors associated with cyberbullying, motivations, consequences and coping, and reporting. The youth researchers helped to define the sample (students in years 2, 4, and 5, ages 14-17). Sixty-four total students participated in 11 focus groups that took place across the four school with oversight by both the adult and young researchers. Aside from summaries provided from the participants perspectives, five themes emerged from the advisory group's evaluation of involvement in the research. These themes include motivation, space, voice, audience, and influence. Dennehy et al. (2019) and the collaboration between students and researchers on the analysis of the eleven focus group interviews identified as an intent to harm as a key element within the student's descriptions of cyberbullying. If a student felt unsafe and that an exchange displayed an intent to harm, it was more likely to be described as bullying. This becomes relevant as the proposed research will further examine that fear as a factor. Although this study did not take place in the U.S., it still illuminates key universal issues associated with bullying.

Bibou-Nakou et al. (2012) examined another facet of searching for that student perspective on bullying, their understanding of the social dynamics behind it. The purpose of their study was to examine student bullying mostly within the school context

from the student perspective and with their perception of larger social dynamics (e.g., student aggression in general). The challenge was to gather more insight from the students' perspective, on both the near and distant factors that influence their understanding of the bullying process and how it fits into a large social dynamic.

Five high schools (of various SES levels) were included in this study, in a major city in Greece. Ninety students were selected, spread (through self-selection) between 14 focus groups. All students were ages 13-15 years old. In addition to group interviews, the students had the opportunity to express their point of view within questionnaires as well. Having multiple data collection methods helped to not only triangulate data, but also to provide students who may not be comfortable in a group setting to express themselves another means to do so.

Social Dominance Theory was an integral part of the research; this theory again, places bullying potentially as one method in achieving social dominance within a larger group. The description helped the reader to understand the broad scope of bullying behavior and its connection to the larger picture. Socially aggressive strategies (e.g., spreading rumors or social exclusion) also potentially help a young person to advance in the peer social hierarchy and to gain social capital in negative and hurtful ways.

Students, through the research of Bibou-Nakou et al. (2012), expressed connection between school climate and the promotion of bullying, if the school climate is one that heavily emphasizes performance and competition. Students also shared concern with the ability to express unique viewpoints, and there was an importance perceived by the students that conformity was valued by the teachers. The findings did indicate that students framed bullying as an issue of school climate overall, verses an outside

phenomenon. The hidden curriculum (teacher/student relationship), academic competition and academic achievement pressure all led the talk from students in both the interviews and questionnaires. This is also tied to previous research that the pressure of academic achievement can be associated with bullying behavior in schools. The implications from the current study could assist and fuel future collaborations between educators and mental health professionals to prevent bullying which also may improve overall school attendance. How reports of cyberbullying and student absenteeism, particularly chronic absenteeism are handled by the school staff can impact the success of any future interventions.

Another factor in bullying is the severity of bullying itself. Hinduja and Patchin (2019) administered a survey to a nationally representative sample of students in the United States ages 12-17. This survey was conducted between August and October of 2016. The researchers found that students that experienced any form (in person, online, or both) of bullying were more likely to report suicidal ideation. Most concerning was that “students who reported being bullied at school and online were even more likely to report not just suicidal thoughts, but also attempts” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019, p. 333). The population of students that had the greatest likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts and attempting suicide were those that were unfortunately subjected to more intense forms of bullying.

Suicide and Self-Injurious Behavior

Suicidal ideation and attempts or completion of suicide, nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) was again, the focus of Guan, Fox, and Prinstein (2012), defining NSSI as a direct and deliberate act that causes self-injury to one’s own body, without intent to die (and is

not socially sanctioned). Previous research identified by Guan, Fox, and Prinstein (2012) acknowledge three important facts, one being that it is now a diagnosis in the fifth version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) as nonsuicidal self-injury disorder (NSSID). The second point is that NSSI is associated concurrently with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. A third point that drove this current study reminds the reader that recent theories suggest that NSSI may be a risk factor for later suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

The researchers sought to investigate NSSI as a possible risk factor for suicide ideation, threats, or gestures, and attempts in adolescence. A total of 399 ninth-grade adolescents participated in the study, all students from three rural high schools in a single county. Measures and questionnaires were administered in the spring of ninth grade and then every six months. There was a total of five data points until the spring of 11th grade. Guan, Fox, and Prinstein (2012) found “compelling evidence from a diverse community-based sample suggesting that higher frequencies of NSSI are indeed associated with significantly increased risks of suicide ideation and attempts, but not threats or gestures” (p. 8). Further area of exploration would be to try to identify the exact mechanism that is responsible for the link between earlier NSSI and later suicidality.

Self-injurious behavior that carries an intention to end one’s life is known as SHID, or self-harm with intent to die. Schneider et al. (2012) looked at an underlying factor of SHID, psychological distress and its connection to bullying. The researchers examined data from a regional census of high school students from 2008. This data set included 20406 9th through 12th grade students in MetroWest Massachusetts and their

completed surveys ascertaining their bullying victimization and psychological distress. Psychological distress can include depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality. The researchers found that 15.8% of students reported cyberbullying and 25.9% of students reported school bullying incidences within the past 12 months prior to the survey. The analysis showed a strong overlap between the two forms of bullying, with 59.7% of cyberbullying victims also reporting school bullying, and 36.3% of school bullying victims also reporting cyberbullying (Schneider et al., 2012). The findings indicated significant connections between both forms of bullying and psychological distress. Both groups indicated an overall elevated psychological distress compared to peers who did not experience any form of bullying. Victims of cyberbullying alone exhibited more psychological distress than school bullying alone. Victims of both forms of bullying were four times as likely to experience symptoms of depression and five times as likely to attempt suicide compared to non-victims (Schneider et al., 2012).

Farmer et al. (2003) proceeded to explore an area of mental health that was less known at the time, how children and adolescents accessed and were referred for mental health services. The essential questions posed by the researchers in 2003 were: how does a child enter mental health services, how do they navigate the supports and services, and do they return once initially exited? For this study, the Great Smoky Mountain Study was accessed, a longitudinal epidemiologic study of mental health problems and service use among children. Data was weighted so that it reflected the general population. Pathways into and through mental health services, as well as factors related to service use patterns were examined. Farmer et al. (2003) found that 54% (based on population estimates)

have used mental health services at some point during their lives. The education sector was the most common point of entry and provider of services (across all age groups).

Based on Farmer et al. (2003), it appears that educators may have the greatest impact on referring children for mental health services but are least likely to continue with support from other areas of support and services. Suicide prevention, in particular, is a complex issue that certainly is beyond the sole scope of the educational field, but school personnel can be the greatest starting point, the point of entry for support of adolescents that display suicidal ideation.

It is important to consider services offered by schools to help with mental health. Crepeau-Hobson (2013) conducted an exploratory study to examine school-based suicide risk assessment practices. Within the analysis, the researcher looked to examine “the procedures used, the frequency of suicide risk assessments, the outcomes of the assessments, and consideration of various demographics of those children and youth who have undergone a risk assessment, including age/grade level, gender, and ethnicity” (Crepeau-Hobson, 2013, p. 812).

Crepeau-Hobson (2013) emphasizes the following concepts in exploring suicide risk assessment practices: school-based suicide prevention and education programs can be effective in decreasing suicidal behavior and preventing deaths by suicide. Using a public health model, youth suicide prevention programs and practices are sorted into three categories: primary (programs designed to provide awareness of suicide, for the general population of students), secondary (selected prevention specifically for students that are considered at risk for suicidality), and tertiary (for youth who have previously engaged in suicidal behavior). There is an educational component and an assessment or

self-screening component to most suicide prevention programs. Data from the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was reviewed, documenting that approximately 13.8% of all American high school students report having seriously considered committing suicide in the past year 6.3% have attempted suicide, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2008.

A convenience sample was used in a study examining districts in a large metropolitan area in western United States that used a standardized suicide risk assessment process and collected and maintained suicide risk assessment data for at least one year; three districts were found and used Crepeau-Hobson (2013). As per the procedure, de-identified suicide risk assessment data (from years the three districts had in common) were analyzed. Suicide prevention coordinators were interviewed and provided all pertinent documentation to be reviewed.

Within this exploratory study, Crepeau-Hobson (2013) found that in all three districts, the risk assessment team used a Suicide Risk Assessment (SRA) form and rated students within a three-level continuum, from low/beginning to medium/moderate to high/emergent risk. Of the three years including all three districts, ten students committed suicide. These ten children were not identified and did not participate in a suicide risk assessment (conversely none of the students who participated in an SRA committed suicide).

Arango et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study of 142 adolescents that identified as bully victimized youth. Family, school, community, youth depression, and suicidal ideation were examined in this study. The participants were recruited between 2011 and 2014 in an urban location of the midwestern region of the United States. A

pediatric general emergency department and urgent care clinic were the two locations where recruitment took place. The analysis looked at adolescents who were connected to different parts of their social systems (primarily family, school, and community) could be protective of depression and suicidal ideation among bullied and victimized students.

The researchers found that the “results of the model predicting suicidal ideation indicated negative associations between subtypes of connectedness (family, school, community) and suicidal ideation (Arango et al., 2019, p. 734). This study aligns with the theoretical framework for this research, in that Social Capital, as part of Social Dominance Theory, indicates an individual with greater social capital, in a variety of locations, may have less a chance of suicidal ideation and could potentially mitigate the effects of bullying.

Bullying, Student Absenteeism, and Suicidal Ideation

The aforementioned study of Crepeau-Hobson (2013) was the initial motivation for the current student study. Were there factors that contributed to individuals in the study not being identified as at-risk students? This essential question intersects with previous studies that have found a statistical significance between bullying (both in person and cyberbullying) and an increase in student absenteeism. Previous studies have also found a statistical significance between bullying and an increase of suicidal ideation. The current study seeks to identify if there should be a greater emphasis and support for a student that has been a victim of bullying behavior and also has a pattern of absenteeism. Will a student that is a victim of bullying and stays home from school have less of a chance of developing suicidal ideation? Perhaps that student gets a reprieve from the bullying behavior at home and is in a better mental state. However, with cyberbullying,

being physically absent from school does not necessarily stop the bullying from occurring online and through social media.

Fear or risk of future harm are two separate entities and could potentially be related in different ways to students that are absent from school due to fear. Kerbs et. al (2005) at the time found extensive research and documentation in terms of scales on prevalence, incidence, and fear of student-to-student victimization, but there was little to no discussion as to the risk. The researchers examined a single Florida public school, with students in grades 7-10 (N=337) using self-reported student surveys for perceived risk as measured by the Adolescent Index for School Safety. The study found that the following factors could contribute to even just the perceived risk: social isolation, gossiping, social exclusion, sexual violence, ridicule of heritage, serious attacks, ridicule of personal characteristics, physical attacks/threats w/out weapons, and property-related violence (Kerbs et al., 2005, p. 134). Both a prior history of victimization, or even a perceived risk could affect students in the areas of suicidal ideation and student absenteeism as well.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

The methods and procedures applied for this study will be explained and described in specific detail within this chapter. This study utilizes the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data. A binary logistic regression was applied to research question number one and a step wise regression was applied to answer research question number two.

Methods and Procedures

Research Questions

This study sought to first confirm if there is a statistically significant association between the reported occurrence of student cyber-bullying and traditional bullying at school, reported absences from school due to fear, and reported thoughts of suicide. This first research question included the effect of in-person bullying, online bullying, and both in-person and online bullying. This study documented these trends utilizing the 2019 YRBS responses of students in grades 9-12. The second research question focused on whether students who reported being a victim of either or both forms of bullying or and also reported seriously considering attempting suicide had a greater chance of missing school. The first hypothesis is that both bullying in all forms and student absenteeism will significantly increase the chances of a student experiencing suicidal thoughts. The second hypothesis is that not only will bullying increase the days absent from school due to fear, but also that suicidal ideation will compound that effect. The step wise regression helped confirm this hypothesis as the independent variables were added in order and analyzed in addition to the previous factor. The same additional covariates were included in the analysis of both research questions.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The research design utilized for this research study is quantitative. The three variables, bullying at school, electronic bullying, and considered suicide are binary variables. Students responded to each of these questions with either a yes or no. The other variable, did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school, is an ordinal variable. The student choices for the dependent variable are A=0 days, B=1 day, C=2 or 3 days, D=4 or 5 days, and E=6 or more days. To answer the first research question, data analysis included use of a binary logistic regression to predict the dependent variable of not attending school due to feeling unsafe as a function of the independent variables of experiencing in person bullying, cyberbullying, and suicidal ideation. For the second research question, a step wise regression was run to determine if the addition of bullying in school, then of bullying online, followed finally with considered suicide improved the prediction of days absent from school due to fear.

As previously stated, covariates were included in the analysis of both research questions. The student choices for race/ethnicity included Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, White, Hispanic/Latino, Multiple/Hispanic, and Multiple Non-Hispanic. Gender choices were male or female only. Sexual orientation options included in the YRBS for students were Gay or Lesbian, Heterosexual/Straight, Bisexual, or Not Sure. Both cigarette smoking and alcohol use included the selections 0 days, 1-2 days, 3-5 days, 6-9 days, 10-19 days, 20-29 days, and all 30 days. Marijuana usage was broken down differently into occurrences per month: 1=0 times, 1-2 times, 3-9 times, 10-19 times, 20-39 times, and 40 or more times.

Reliability and Validity of the Research Design

The YRBS (2019) is an instrument from a substantially sized sample and has been replicated over many years with respected reliability and validity. The research design is correlational, not causal, therefore it's subject to other factors, which is why several covariates were also pulled from the YRBS and included in this research study. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) is the largest public health surveillance system in the United States. Multiple health-related behaviors among high school students have been monitored and analyzed since 1991. To date, the YRBSS has collected data from approximately 4.9 million high school students. The YRBS has been utilized as a data source by many within the research field. The National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, in a recent report, highlighted its use of the YRBS as a data source on the basis of the strengths of the YRBSS system (National Academies of Sciences, 2020).

The Sample and Population

Data from the 2019 YRBS conducted among a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school students in grades 9-12 were used ($n = 13,677$). The YRBS data were de-identified so all student information is anonymous. The national YRBS procedures were approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Institutional Review Board. A random sample of classes within a nationally representative sample of schools were selected to participate in the survey. A total of 13,872 individual questionnaires were completed during the 2019 YRBS, with 195 surveys failing quality control and excluded from analysis, again leaving 13,677 remaining usable questionnaires. The

percentage of schools that responded to the survey was 75.1% with the student response rate being 80.3%.

Of the 13,677 total participants that completed the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, only students that had valid data for all the variables listed above were used in data analysis for this study. Students that had one or more missing values in these categories were eliminated. One factor in deciding to eliminate those cases with missing values was that it is difficult to account for these cases otherwise by other means given the unique nature of these questions. Another factor utilized in eliminating these cases was because the data set was large, and the numbers of these reported missing data points were low. After the missing cases were eliminated, a total of 13,242 total participants still remained. This analytic sample was the same for all regressions ran in this research.

The YRBS survey results were weighted by the CDC based on student sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level. This weight was then applied to each record to account for school and student nonresponse. The CDC also utilized this weight to prevent an oversampling of Black and Hispanic students. The overall weights were scaled such that the data is in fact representative of students in grades 9-12 in public and private schools across the United States.

Within the weighted analysis, 50.6% of the students were male. The grade level proportions were as follows: 26.6% were in 9th grade, 25.5% were in 10th grade, 24.2% were in 11th grade, and 23.5% were in 12th grade. With respect to race/ethnicity, 51.2% of the respondents were non-Hispanic white (white), 26.1% Hispanic, 12.2% black, and 10.6% other (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Multiracial Non-Hispanic). In terms of sexual orientation, 84.4% of the

students identified themselves as heterosexual, 2.5% as gay or lesbian, 8.7% as bisexual, and 4.5% as unsure of their sexual identity.

Table 1

Description of 2019 YRBS Survey Respondents

Variable	%
Grade Level	
9	26.6%
10	25.5%
11	24.2%
12	23.5%
Gender	
Male	50.6%
Female	49.4%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	51.2%
Hispanic	26.1%
Black	12.2%
Other	10.6%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	84.4%
Gay or Lesbian	2.5%
Bisexual	8.7%
Unsure	4.5%

Instruments

The 2019 YRBS questionnaire itself contained 99 questions. Of these questions, 89 questions were required for the standard questionnaire. Ten additional questions could be added that reflected areas of interest in both the Center for Disease Control or other various stakeholders. The flexibility allowed local survey administrators to customize their survey in order to investigate specific topics of interest. The survey questions were revised to reflect emerging and prevailing risk behaviors among adolescents, including input from subject matter experts within the CDC and outside the

agency. Questions were reviewed for format, readability, and clarity, and underwent cognitive testing. Further refinements based upon the cognitive testing led to the final 2019 YRBS. The final instrument then underwent test-retest analysis and demonstrated good reliability.

Both in 1992 and 2000, the CDC conducted test-retest reliability studies of the national YRBS questionnaire (Brener et al., 2013). In the first study, the questionnaire was administered twice (at 14 days apart) to 1679 students in grades 7-12. Approximately 75% of the questions were rated as having a high reliability. In a second study in 2000, the questionnaire was administered twice (at 14 days apart) to 4,619 high school students. This test-retest reliability study did find that the reliability of some of the questions were problematic. These questions were either revised or deleted from later versions of the questionnaire.

The survey was anonymously self-administered, utilizing a physical questionnaire booklet that is computer scannable. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. In 2019, a total of 44 states, 28 local school districts, three territories, and two tribal governments had representative data and were included in the analysis. A total of 13,872 questionnaires were completed in 136 schools for the 2019 YRBS. Missing data were not statistically imputed, after the 2019 YRBS results were cleaned and edited for inconsistencies. Of the 13,872 completed questionnaires, 195 failed quality control and were excluded from analysis. This resulted in 13,677 usable questionnaires. A failed questionnaire was defined as a survey where either less than 20 responses remained after editing or if greater or equal to 15 consecutive questions contained the same response.

It is important to highlight the essential YRBS survey questions that were included in the analysis. The survey question that addressed student absenteeism due to fear was “During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?” Student choices for this question were 0 days, 1 day, 2 or 3 days, 4 or 5 days, and 6 or more days. The two bullying questions included: “During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied on school property?” and “During the past 12 months, have you ever been electronically bullied?” The survey question that addressed suicidal ideation asked students: “During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?” Choice answers that were given to students for these last three survey questions were either yes or no.

Procedures for Collecting Data

This study relied on secondary data that had already been collected and readily available to the public domain. The YRBS, since 1990, has been administered under contract with ICF Macro, Inc., an ICF International Company. The CDC provides oversight, with the contractor then responsible for sample design, sample selection, and obtaining any state, district, and school-based clearances to have these questionnaires administered. ICF Macro, Inc. then partners with the sampled schools to dedicate classes, a data collection schedule, and to secure parent/guardian permission. In terms of collecting the data, the contractor then hires and trains data collectors to administer and collect the questionnaires within the schools and prepares the data for analysis. Students completed the self-administered questionnaire during one class period and recorded their responses directly onto the computer-scannable booklet. I downloaded this publicly

available data, cleaned, and recoded variables as needed for the purposes of this particular study.

Research Ethics

The protocol for the YRBS was approved by the CDC's Institutional Review Board. Students' privacy was protected by survey procedures that allowed for anonymous and voluntary participation. Local parental permission procedures were followed prior to survey administration. The St John's University Institutional Review Board approved this research with its official decision being exempt (IRB #: IRB-FY2021-450).

Conclusion

The importance of the research questions has been established. The alignment with the Vincentian Mission that emphasizes research that searches out causes of social injustice and to seek solutions has been documented. The connection with the YRBS, which was first developed by the CDC in 1990 to monitor health behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States is clear. The binary logistic regression and step wise regression that were utilized in this research helped answer the research questions and contribute to further clarity in identifying and assisting students that are chronically bullied, absent from school due to fear, and that may experience suicidal ideation.

CHAPTER 4

Results

In this chapter, a detailed analysis of the results is provided. The Stress Model Theory that explains suicidal ideation and the Social Dominance Theory that provides a framework of bullying behavior intersect along with student absenteeism based on fear within this data analysis. This intersection becomes clear as both days absence from school and suicidal ideation are treated as independent variables in separate analyses.

First, to get a general sense of the pertinent variables and the included covariates, a descriptive analysis was run (see Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5). Notably over 10% of students reported being bullied at school and online. Slightly over 9% of students acknowledged being bullied only at school while approximately 5% of students shared that they were only bullied online. Almost 19% of all students had thoughts of suicide at some point. Approximately 9% of all students reported missing school as least one day due to fear of attending school. To answer how these factors and covariates interact, a regression analyses follows for a more comprehensive examination of those relationships.

Table 2

Bullying at School Only, Electronic Bullying Only, Both Forms of Bullying and Considered Suicide Descriptive

Student Response	Yes	No
Bully at School Only	9.1%	90.9%
Bully Online Only	5.3%	94.7%
Both Forms of Bullying	10.2%	89.8%
Thoughts of Suicide	18.6%	81.4%

Table 3

Days Absent Due to Safety Concerns at School Descriptive

Days Absent	0 Days	1 Day	2-3 Days	4-5 Days	6+ Days
Percentage	91.4	4.4	2.7	0.6	1.0

Table 4*Cigarette and Alcohol Use Descriptive*

DaysofUse	0	1-2	3-5	6-9	10-19	20-29	30
Cigarette%	90.8	2.5	.8	.5	.5	.2	1
Alcohol%	66.1	14.9	6.6	3.4	1.4	.4	.6

Table 5*Marijuana Use Descriptive*

DayInMonth	0	1-2	3-9	10-19	20-39	40+
Percentage	76.8	7.8	4.6	2.7	2.2	3.7

Next, prior to addressing the predominant research questions, the interaction between in-person bullying and cyberbullying was examined. A chi-square test for association was conducted between bullying at school and electronic bullying. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. There was a statistically significant association between bullying at school and electronic bullying, $\chi^2(1) = 3379.293, p < .001$. There was a strong association between bullying at school and electronic bullying, $\phi = 0.503, p < .001$. In fact, of those students who experienced in person bullying, a little more than half also experienced cyber bullying (see Table 6). For those students that did not experience school bullying, only 6.6% experienced cyber bullying.

Table 6*In-Person Bullying and Cyberbullying Chi Square Crosstabulation*

	Cyberbullying Yes	Cyberbullying No
School Bullying Yes	52.8%	47.2%
School Bullying No	6.6%	93.4%

Research Question 1

A binomial logistic regression was used to predict the dichotomous dependent variable of whether a student considered suicide. The independent variables included bullying (cyber-bullying alone, traditional bullying alone, and both forms of bullying at school) and the reported occurrence of missing school due to fear. The covariates also included in the analysis were grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, cigarette use, alcohol use, marijuana use, and sexual identify. In terms of the required assumptions for use of a binomial logistic regression, the dependent variable is dichotomous and the independent variables are all nominal. There is independence of observations with both variables which satisfies that criterion. There are more than 15 cases for the independent variables. The assumption of linearity test was not required as the independent variable is not continuous. A casewise plot was not produced and no outliers were found.

The binomial logistic regression was then performed to ascertain the effects of bullying, days absent from school due to fear, and the covariates on the likelihood that students reported thoughts of suicide. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(20) = 1506.08, p < .001$. The model explained 21% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in which students considered suicide. All of the main independent variables of interest were found to be significant predictors of suicide ideation (see Table 7). Students reporting school bullying alone were 2.2 times more likely to report suicidal ideation than students reporting no bullying ($p < .001$). Students experiencing cyberbullying alone were 1.6 times more likely to report suicidal ideation than students reporting no bullying ($p < .001$). Both forms of bullying for students led to a 3.7 times greater likelihood to also report suicidal ideation ($p < .001$). In terms of days absent from

school due to fear, those students were 1.5 times more likely to consider suicide ($p < .001$). Of the covariates, alcohol and marijuana use increased the chances of considering suicide by 1.1 times and 1.2 times respectively. Cigarette use and grade level were not significant predictors. Students reporting as male were significantly related as actually reducing the chances of reporting suicidal ideation. Within the race and ethnicity category, being either Asian or Multiple Race Non-Hispanic (compared to White students) were both associated with 1.4 the increased chance of also reporting thoughts of suicide. Students who reported themselves as heterosexual were 30% less likely than non-heterosexual students to report suicidal ideation.

Table 7

Binomial Logistic Regression to Predict Considered Suicide by Bullying, Days Absent From School Due to Fear, and Covariates

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
SchoolBully	.793	.085	87.22	1	.000***	2.210	1.871	2.611
CyberBully	.452	.111	16.696	1	.000***	1.572	1.265	1.953
BothBully	1.300	.077	282.966	1	.000***	3.669	3.153	4.269
DaysAbsent	.400	.046	75.152	1	.000***	1.492	1.363	1.633
Cigarette	.057	.036	2.604	1	.107	1.059	.988	1.136
Alcohol	.138	.029	22.180	1	.000*	1.149	1.084	1.217
Marijuana	.205	.022	87.372	1	.000***	1.228	1.176	1.282
Male	-.491	.057	74.149	1	.000***	.612	.547	.684
Grade10	.059	.076	.605	1	.437	1.061	.914	1.233
Grade11	.082	.077	1.130	1	.288	1.086	.933	1.263
Grade12	-.001	.079	.000	1	.994	.999	.856	1.167
Ungraded	-22.02	16743	.000	1	.999	.000	.000	.
Indian/Alaska	.534	.354	2.271	1	.132	1.706	.852	3.417
Asian	.343	.117	8.653	1	.003**	1.409	1.121	1.771
Black/African	-.030	.094	.099	1	.753	.971	.807	1.168
NativeHawaiian	-.034	.502	.005	1	.946	.966	.361	2.587
HispanicLatino	-.140	.105	1.794	1	.180	.869	.708	1.067
Multi-Hispanic	-.123	.078	2.478	1	.115	.885	.759	1.031
Multi-NonHisp	.338	.122	7.721	1	.005**	1.402	1.105	1.780
Heterosexual	-1.32	.063	433.996	1	.000***	.267	.236	.302
Constant	-1.66	.103	258.825	1	.000	.190	.	.

*Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. All forms of Bullying were compared to No Bullying, Males were compared to Females, Grades 10-12 & Ungraded were compared to Grade 9, all races were compared to White, and Heterosexual was compared to Gay/Lesbian, Bisexual, or Not Sure. $N = 13242$.*

Research Question 2

The second research question examined the interaction between bullying, suicidal ideation, and the dependent variable, absenteeism. Specifically, is there a statistically significant relationship between the four variables (traditional bullying, cyberbullying, both forms of bullying and reported occurrence of seriously considering attempting suicide) and additional covariates with the dependent variable (absent because of fear of attending school)? In terms of the assumptions for utilizing a hierarchical multiple regression, there is one independent variable that is continuous, or more specifically a count variable (treated as continuous in the analysis) of reported safety concerns at school. There are two or more independent variables that are measured either at the continuous or nominal level. Analysis of the Durbin-Watson statistic indicate use of this data analysis tool is appropriate.

The step wise regression was run with Model 1 being just the covariates. Model 2 added the addition of bullying in school, Model 3 included bullying online, Model 4 layered in both forms of bullying, and finally Model 5 considered suicide in how each variable possibly improved the prediction of days absent from school due to fear. See Table 8 for full details on the essential regression models. The addition of bullying in school only to the prediction of days absent (Model 2) was statistically significant increase, $R^2 = .001$, $F(1, 10917) = 14.460$, $p < .001$. With the addition of cyber bullying only to in school bullying to the prediction of days absent (Model 3), this did not lead to a statistically significant model, $R^2 < .001$, $F(1, 10916) = 2.197$, $p = .138$. When both

forms of bullying (in school and online) were added, this did lead to a statistically significant model, $R^2 = .029$, $F(1, 10915) = 334.530$, $p < .001$. Likewise layering in considered suicide also increased the prediction of days absent from school with statistical significance, $R^2 = .009$, $F(1, 10914) = 101.262$, $p < .001$.

Table 8

Step Wise Regression to Predict Days Absent From School Due to Fear By Bullying, Considered Suicide and Covariates

Variable	Days Absent From School Due to Fear					
	Model 1		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	1.014		.946		.912	
Cigarette	.080	.117***	.076	.110***	.074	.107***
Alcohol	.040	.081***	.033	.066***	.030	.061***
Marijuana	-.001	-.003	-.001	-.004	-.006	-.014
Male	-.022	-.022*	-.001	-.001	.006	.006
10 th Grade	-.011	-.010	-.010	-.008	-.010	-.009
11 th Grade	.014	.012	.023	.020	.022	.019
12 th Grade	-.036	-.031**	-.024	-.021	-.024	-.020
Ungraded	-.046	-.002	.027	.001	.080	.003
Indian/Alaska	.095	.013	.092	.013	.082	.011
Asian	-.009	-.004	.013	.006	.007	.003
Black African American	.081	.050***	.104	.064***	.104	.064***
NativeHawaiian	-.015	-.002	-.016	-.002	-.015	-.002
Hispanic/Latino	.018	.010	.042	.024*	.044	.025**
Multiple Hispanic	.102	.076***	.116	.087***	.117	.088***
Multiple Non-Hispanic	.084	.035***	.091	.038**	.084	.035***
Heterosexual	-.065	-.047***	-.043	-.031**	-.013	-.009
Bullying at School			.104	.058***	.088	.049***
Bullying Online			.072	.032**	.063	.028**
Both Forms of Bullying			.293	.175***	.261	.156***
Consider Suicide					.129	.100***
R^2	.039		.069		.077	

Note. N=10935. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

In terms of the covariates in the analysis looking at Model 5 where all four independent variables are included, both cigarette and alcohol use were both significant predictors of being absent from school due to fear, but marijuana use was not. Being Male was not a significant predictor. When considering race/ethnicity, the groups that

were significant predictors for increasing the chance of missing school included Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Multiple Race/Hispanic, and Multiple Race/Non-Hispanic. Being Heterosexual was not a significant predictor when considered in Model 5, however, it was in lowering the likelihood of missing school when factoring in only forms of bullying (and not suicidal ideation).

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Since the YRBS has been a publicly available data set since 1990, there have been numerous studies using this data on youth risk behaviors. Some of the findings of this current study do confirm or replicate with the most recent incarnation of this survey and its results. Some of the combination of covariates and order of independent variables new to the area of bullying, suicidal ideation, and student absenteeism, however, do have some new conclusions and significance.

Implications of Findings

There are some important connections between both analyses. Although both school bullying and cyberbullying alone were associated with increased suicidal ideation in students grades 9 to 12, it was when both forms of bullying were experienced that we saw the greatest increase in suicidal ideation. This finding might be an area to focus on for school support staff. From my experience, incidents of reported bullying are often investigated under the guidance of the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), a program in New York State. DASA incidents are investigated with more of a narrow scope, in terms of the exact events and individual(s) known to the team. For example, a student that reports being bullied in person might be supported for that incident alone, but perhaps there should be an exploratory investigation into the student's social media world as well, since if a student reports one form of bullying, it is significantly likely that the student is also experiencing the other form (or both); and with both forms of bullying being active, that student is more likely to experience suicidal ideation.

In terms of missing school due to fear, being bullied in person alone was a significant predictor, however, being bullied online only was not. This interesting

finding seems to support the Stress Model Theory, in which an individual will often try to avoid the cause of a significant stressor. If a student is being bullied at school in person, staying home from school helps the student avoid the source of the stress. On the other hand, if a student is bullied online only, that stress may exist regardless of whether the student stays home from school since that trigger can come online at any time, in school or at home. Suicidal ideation, when considered over both forms of bullying, significantly increased the likelihood and frequency of days absent from school due to fear. When monitoring truancy data, this should be considered, in exploring unexplained absences from school. If a student is being bullied and also has thoughts of suicide, those may be the students that are missing more of school.

In terms of race, students that identified as Asian and Multiple Race (Non-Hispanic) were more likely to experience suicidal ideation than White students. This might be in account of additional academic pressures on Asian students, especially those of recent immigration. Students that identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Multiple Race (Hispanic) and Multiple Race (Non-Hispanic) were more likely to miss days of school due to fear. A factor that might impact this fear might be the neighborhood settings, getting to school where the bullying occurred. Inconsistent or unsafe public transportation (in urban areas), local crime rates, etc. could also be factors that keep a student home from school out of fear. The one group that was consistent between both analyses as being a significant predictor of the dependent variables was Multiple Race (Non-Hispanic), which is something that school mental health staff and truancy officers should monitor.

Gender had an impact in a specific way. When factored over bullying, being male was associated with a reduced chance of experiencing suicidal ideation, as compared to females. When factored alone, in predicting days absent from school due to fear, being male also was significant as compared to females in reducing that likelihood. However, when bullying in all forms and suicidal ideation was layered in as predictors, gender no longer was significant. It is not clear as to why this is the case and should be investigated further.

The YRBS delineated sexual orientation into the categories of heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure. Although the term LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning) is better aligned with the greater continuum of human sexual identify and orientation, only the terms lesbian, gay, or unsure will be discussed here due to the limitations of the survey. Being a student that identified as heterosexual became a significant predictor in reducing the chances of experiencing suicidal ideation. This was the same for predicting the likelihood of missing school due to fear, missing less days as a factor alone, and with all forms of bullying. However, in terms of missing days due to fear and also reporting being a victim of bullying and experiencing suicidal ideation, sexual preference or orientation was no longer significant. This was a similar effect with gender, which also was significant at times, however, when predicting days absent from school due to fear, for students that were both bullied and had suicidal thoughts, both gender and sexual orientation no longer was significant. Perhaps the compound effect of being bullied and subject to suicidal ideation negated the sway of these other factors.

Alcohol consumption was a significant predictor of both suicidal ideation and missing days of school due to fear. In fact, alcohol increased the odds of increasing student absenteeism in all models of analysis (all variations of bullying, alone, and along with suicidal ideation). Marijuana use increased the odds of having thoughts of suicide, however, it wasn't a significant factor for missing days of school. Cigarette smoking was mixed impacting with statistically significant relationships for days absent in all models but did not increase the probability of a student experiencing suicidal ideation.

Grade level had minimal relevance within both analyses. For research question one, in terms of predicting suicidal ideation, there was no significance for any grade level (grades 8-12 and ungraded were compared to grade 9). The only time that grade level was a significant factor was when taken alone (regardless of bullying and suicidal ideation variables), being in grade 12 was a statistically significant factor in actually reducing the chances of missing school due to fear. Perhaps this is because of absence of the other independent variables, an older more mature student might have less fear of attending school.

Relationship to Prior Research

From the Steiner and Rasberry (2015) study of the 2013 YRBS, the researchers again, found a statistically significant association between both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying, alone and in combination, with the increased chance of missing school due to fear. Within the current research analysis of the 2019 YRBS, likewise there was a statistically significant association between bullying in person and both forms of bullying on the increase of student absenteeism due to fear. However, within the current research, adding cyberbullying alone was not significant, which is a change from the analysis of

the 2014 YRBS by Steiner and Rasberry. One potential theory for this change is the topography of social media behavior has changed from 2013 to 2019, such that students are even more immersed in the use of technology such that escaping online only bullying may feel impossible. Students not attending school to avoid online bullying may no longer be thought of as effective for students.

Baiden and Tadeo (2020) from the analysis of the 2017 YRBS found similar results as compared to the current research, in terms of the association between bullying victimization and suicidal ideation among adolescents. There was an increase of the students reporting being victims of both forms of bullying from 9.1% of students to 10.2%. Students who were a recipient of both forms of bullying now have a slightly higher rate of suicidal ideation at 3.7 times verses 3.26 from the analysis of Baiden and Tadeo. Students from the 2019 YRBS also have increased the rate (at 2.2 verses 2.15 from 2017) of suicidal ideation. The only decrease was for students that reported cyberbullying alone, for those students their rate of suicidal ideation was a 1.6 times verses 2 times from 2017.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is the inability to include other possible significant factors that could also influence suicidal ideation and student absenteeism such as household income and abuse in the home. In addition, the severity of bullying behavior, as determined to be a significant factor by Hinduja and Patchin (2019), could not be included in this study, as that question is not asked of students in the YRBS. In fact, the instrumentation itself is a limitation, as it was a coarse measure of many factors (both binary and ordinal).

The type of bullying is also not included in the YRBS. In person bullying could include, for example, social isolation, non-verbal threats, verbal threats, physical assault, sexual assault, and other forms of ridicule or intimidation. Online bullying has most certainly evolved as the different platforms and integration of different social technologies have increased and improved. Online bullying ten years ago perhaps could be a threatening text message or inappropriate image posted within one social media platform. In the current online world, one posting could be reshared automatically within other platforms. Greater bandwidth and cellphone capabilities allow for more frequent and larger images, files and information to be shared in a quicker fashion. The online bystander to bullying behavior might want social capital of their own and repost or further spread the inappropriate words, images, or video that can exacerbate the situation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should consider a longitudinal study of the same nature, as some of these variables, could precede each other without prior knowledge. Absenteeism and suicidal ideation could be bi-directional. An interaction model within future research could shed more light on that. Also, an individual may experience suicidal ideation even prior to the onset of bullying behavior. A longitudinal study might pick up on some of these variations. The severity of bullying behavior should also be considered as well as further specificity to cyberbullying. As the online and social media worlds becomes increasingly more widespread and complex, it may not be sufficient enough to ask a student if they are bullied online. How are they bullied? Within what platforms? Is it through sharing inappropriate words, photos, or videos? Or is it by exclusion or other forms of harassment? Future research that included more direct quantitative data from

schools (e.g., direct attendance records) as well as qualitative data might be helpful in further exploring the factors that lead to both suicidal ideation and student absenteeism. In the wake of such future research, perhaps anti-bullying campaigns could also be enhanced as a result. Everyone needs social capital, including our students. How an individual gains that capital, whether through appropriate ways or not, is an essential part of our schools and society.

The identification of students reporting as Asian or Multiple Race (Non-Hispanic) having a greater chance of experiencing suicidal ideation should be further explored as well. A factor that should be considered in future research along with this research's similar analysis is the length of time a student has been living in the United States. Research conducted in 2014 found that immigrant youth (having lived in the United States six years or less) had significantly higher odds of attempting suicide (within all five sites included in the analysis) and not going to school because of safety concerns (four of the five sites) (Jones et al., 2016). These researchers examined the YRBS from 2009 and 2011 in order to answer the research question of to what extent would the length of time a student had lived in the US be associated with a variety of health risk behaviors. The work of these researchers did not examine the exact configuration of the current study, in terms of the intersection of suicidal ideation, bullying, and missing school due to fear, however, their conclusion may apply for future research that combines to two: "in the case of suicide, the pressures of living with competing values and norms of different cultures (i.e., acculturation stress) may play a role" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 157).

Future research could also be of the mixed methods format, or qualitative alone. Student voice is expressed through the YRBS, yes, however, student and school staff interviews could provide additional insight into the school and problems of bullying, suicidal ideation, and student absenteeism. An autoethnography might also be valuable into the field of research, but of course sharing one's own experiences, if any, with these topics might be difficult for the researcher to do, due to the potential sensitive nature of suicidal ideation and experiences of bullying.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on this current research, greater oversight should be provided for a student that has been a victim of bullying behavior and also has a pattern of absenteeism. The guidance department may typically be more focused on the bullying aspect, while a separate truancy officer or other school administrators may only be looking at student absenteeism. Data on both of these issues may not even live in the same domain or student management system. Threats or thoughts of suicide, confirmed incidents of bullying, and student attendance data should be housed in the same domain and reviewed periodically to look for trends as part of a comprehensive child study team.

Suicidal ideation can be screened for and detected in various ways. As a result, potential suicide attempts might be prevented. However, as the review of the research by Crepeau-Hobson (2013) reports, ten students in a three-year span within three school districts committed suicide, and none were identified by the risk assessment team. This statement is by no means a criticism of these previous school teams, as the identification of students at risk of suicide and prevention of suicide are complex feats. Perhaps more data points could be added to the consideration of school risk assessment teams, such as

students that are missing school due to fear and are experiencing bullying behavior. Students of mixed race (non-Hispanic) might be a subgroup worth additional layers of oversight and protection as they were significant in both research questions.

Conclusion

Suicidal ideation, bullying, and student absenteeism are three known factors that can have negative outcomes for students in school. How these factors interact, compound each other, and are influenced by other factors are still an area that requires more exploration and dedication. It was the purpose of this research to add further illumination on another layer of understanding of these phenomena in hopes of contributing to future research and prevention efforts. If you or someone you know is a victim of suicidal ideation and/or bullying, please get help; there are great resources out there to access.

APPENDIX

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-450

Title: Bullying, Student Absenteeism, and Suicidal Ideation

Creation Date: 4-30-2021

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Thomas Sposato

Review Board: St John's University Institutional Review Board

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