



NAME: de Bok, Dana

Surname

TITLE OF THESIS:

Perceptions of Bullying in Child and  
Youth Workers and Social Service  
Workers.

DEGREE: BA Psychology

YEAR GRANTED: 2009

I, the undersigned, give permission for my thesis to be consulted as a regular part of the Arthur A. Wishart Library collection and also to reproduce all or parts of it, for scholarly research only, in compliance with the Copyright Act.

SIGNATURE: Dana deBok

DATE: Monday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Running head: PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

Perceptions of Bullying in Child and Youth Workers and  
Social Service Workers

Dana de Bok

Algoma University

## Abstract

Bullying is increasing in schoolyards around the world at an alarming rate and with fatal consequences. The current study examines whether Child and Youth Workers (CYW) and Social Service Workers (SSW) differ in their ability to identify bullying acts, and which form of bullying, covert or overt, is identified more frequently. I hypothesized that CYW would better identify bullying acts than SSW because their schooling is more directed towards working with children. Past research has shown that overt forms of bullying are easier to identify than covert forms. I therefore hypothesized that overt bullying acts would more likely be identified than covert acts. While there were no differences among the groups in their identification accuracy, overt bullying acts were more frequently identified than covert acts. The results suggest that training to identify covert acts of bullying should occur during training, as these types of acts can be equally as damaging to the victim.

## Perceptions of Bullying in Child and Youth Workers and Social Service Workers

Bullying is increasing in schoolyards around the world at an alarming rate and with potentially fatal consequences. Children use bullying to manipulate, hurt, and gain and maintain popularity. A major characteristic of bullying is aggression. Aggression is defined as behavior, both verbal and physical, that is intended to hurt; it does not matter if this behavior is due to a reaction to hostility or as retaliation (Myers, 2004). Bullying is defined as any form of aggression, direct or indirect, which is repeated over time; there is also an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. It has been found that females use indirect bullying and boys use direct bullying (James & Owens, 2005; Solberg et al. 2007; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000).

Bullying occurs in many settings, but it is within school settings and within peer groups that bullying is more prominent. Researchers have noted that as children get older there is an increase in the amount of bullying. As girls age the amount of indirect bullying tends to increase as they enter high school. This increase could occur because as children age their social goals shift to wanting more dominance and popularity, which could lead to more bullying (Solberg et al. 2007; Ringrose, 2006).

Direct bullying includes behaviors that can be observed. Indirect or relational bullying includes behaviors that cannot be easily observed (Bullying, 1997). There are several different types of direct and indirect bullying. Physical bullying is the most obvious direct form of bullying; this is physically hurting someone (punching or kicking). But there is also an indirect aspect of physical bullying and that is stealing. Exclusion is a form of bullying where the bully

purposely leaves somebody out (“you can’t play with us”). Verbal bullying is when the victim is spoken to in hurtful and aggressive ways (“you are such a loser”). Emotional bullying encompasses a wide variety of different forms of bullying, but it focuses on using these different types of bullying to socially embarrass the victim (purposely pointing out an embarrassing moment for example when a girl gets her period). Cyber bullying is using various forms of technology to bully (using Facebook to send vicious messages). There are two new forms of bullying: sexual and racial. Sexual bullying includes behaviors such as sexual jokes, comments, gestures, and looks; it also includes unwelcome touching and advancements of any kind, and allegations of homosexuality (“you are such a fag” or “nice boobs”). Racial bullying includes all of the behaviors previously mentioned as well as ostracism and name-calling (“Raghead”) (Bullying, 1997). An incident of bullying may be considered more direct or indirect depending on the context in which the incident occurs.

The effects of being a victim are long lasting, and can be life threatening. Victims have a higher dropout rate from school and poor psychosocial adjustment. Research has found that victims suffer from academic and emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, difficulties with relationships, and are at an increased risk of developing depression. Victimization can also be linked to running away, not attending school, and attempting to commit suicide. (Bauman, Del Rio, 2006). The main characteristic that makes a victim more vulnerable to being bullied is that they are physically weaker (Bullying, 1997).

Victims of bullying can usually be put into two different categories, passive and proactive victims. The most at-risk victims are the passive victims. These victims tend to internalize their feelings, try to avoid and escape their bully, skip school, avoid certain areas of the school, do not attend school activities or functions, run away, and may commit suicide. Proactive victims

externalize their feelings; they may be disruptive, confrontational, and aggressive. When they are bullied they react by being violent and expressing anger. To defend themselves these victims could possibly bring weapons to school (Bullying, 1997).

Once a student is a victim of bullying, chances are they will continue to be a victim. Chronic bullying can have devastating effects on the victim such as low self-esteem, depression, isolation, anxiety, aggression towards others, and suicide (Bullying, 1997).

While looking at the effects that indirect bullying has, Owens et al. (2000) also came across a couple characteristics that make girls more likely to become a victim of bullying. They noted that most girls stated that it was their own fault; they must have aggravated somebody in the group that has a higher status than themselves. They also noted that some girls are just more vulnerable to being a victim. They have few friends, are new to the school, and they are different; they do not fit in with what is deemed popular. For male victims they are weaker, overweight, and unattractive; basically they are the boys who are not seen as popular by their peers (Bullying, 1997).

Based on written vignettes and various scales researchers have found that teachers find relational bullying the least serious out of the three types of bullying (physical, verbal, and relational), would usually not intervene, and they had little empathy for the victim. Schools do not have policies to deal with indirect bullying and therefore it goes ignored in most schools (Bauman & Del Rio 2006; Yoon, 2003).

There are many aspects of indirect bullying that may make it difficult for teachers to intervene. One of these aspects is a lack of policies dealing with indirect bullying. In most schools there is a zero tolerance rule (zero tolerance for physical violence). With such a policy in

place, teachers have guidelines regarding when to intervene and what actions to take. This is not true regarding indirect bullying. Indirect bullying is covert, which makes it difficult for teachers to see. Teachers may feel that if they refer a case of indirect bullying to administrators they will be seen as a poor teacher, but this is not so with physical bullying. Teachers also do not know the extent to which the victim is hurt, when they are a victim of indirect bullying, with physical aggression the teacher can quickly assess the severity of the situation. When teachers do not respond to indirect aggression, students see this as ignoring the behavior and therefore it is seen as acceptable. For the victim it leads to the belief that they cannot be protected and that teachers do not care (Bauman & Del Rio 2006; Yoon, 2003).

There is a large amount of research happening regarding teachers' awareness of bullying, how sympathetic they are to the various forms of bullying (direct and indirect), and when they intervene to stop bullying. Results of previous studies have shown that teachers were not aware of the extent to which bullying is happening, they had little empathy for victims of indirect bullying, and 85% of teachers stated that they always or often stopped bullying, but students said they only intervened 35% of the time (Bauman & Del Rio 2006; Yoon, 2003). Results of these studies indicate that teachers are doing a poor job at identifying, recognizing, and intervening in bullying incidents. But what about other professionals that interact directly or indirectly with children? This study will examine how perceptive pre-service (student) Child and Youth Workers (CYW) and Social Service Workers (SSW) are to bullying. More specifically, is there a difference between the accuracy of CYWs and SSWs in recognizing and identifying various forms of bullying? It will also study if these soon-to-be professionals are able to identify direct and indirect forms of bullying.

I predict that there will be a difference between the accuracy of CYWs and SSWs. CYWs should be more accurate at recognizing and identifying bullying incidents because their schooling focuses more on children, where as the education of SSWs is broader. But in reality both should be accurate because their career path will lead them to working directly or indirectly with children, and the reality is most children experience some form of bullying. Past research supports the prediction that participants will be able to recognize the direct forms of bullying more easily. As a result of this, indirect forms of bullying will be noticed but not as often direct bullying.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Students in Child and Youth Worker and Social Service Worker programs at a small college in northern Ontario comprised the sample for the present study. Of the 41 participants, 31 (76%) were female, 7 (17%) were male, and 3 (7%) did not specify their sex. Ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 45, with a mean age of 22. Twenty (49 %) were Child and Youth Workers and 21 (51 %) were Social Service Workers.

### *Measures*

Four vignettes were used to assess the ability of CYWS and SSWs to recognize various forms of bullying. There were seven types of bullying used in the stories; cyber, emotional, exclusion, physical, sexual, racial, and verbal. Each type of bullying was used in both direct and indirect form of bullying. The vignettes were created by the researcher, contained an average of 362 words, and presented various forms of direct and indirect bullying. The vignettes were



based on real world types of experiences that junior and senior high school students might encounter. Each vignette was from a different perspective; a female victim, a male victim, a female bully, and a male bully-bystander. A bully-bystander is someone who actively participates in bullying acts and other times stands by and watches other people bully the victim. Different perspectives were used to assure that a variety of different aspects of bullying were covered; males using and experiencing direct and indirect forms of bullying and females using and experiencing direct and indirect forms of bullying.

To assess how accurate CYWs and SSWs are at identifying forms of bullying a data collection sheet was used. The data collection sheets accompanied the vignettes. Participants were asked to rank all of the incidents of bullying they recognized on a 5-point likart scale; 1= not sever to 5= severe. The participants then were asked to give reasons for severity. Lastly, they were requested to give reasons why is could be considered a bullying incident.

### *Procedure*

Coordinators and instructors of the desired programs were contacted, and permission was requested to conduct this research. The instructors agreed to allow the study to take place during class time. Forty-five minutes of class time was provided to complete the study.

Prior to data collection, participants provided informed consent and were then given the package containing the study materials and verbal instructions for completing the materials. The participants were told not to open their package until further directions were given. The package contained one big manila envelope. Within this envelop there were four additional manila envelopes; each of these envelopes contained a vignette and a data collection sheet. The study was introduced as research on bullying and the verbal instructions were then given. Participants

were asked to read and highlight any forms of bullying within the stories, each incident of bullying they noticed they were asked to number it. After reading the stories they were asked to fill out the data sheet that was the same envelope, and then place the story and the data collection sheet back into the envelope. It was important that the participants highlighted and number the incidents of bullying on the actual stories so that it would coincide with the data collected on the data collection sheet. The researcher remained in the room and was available to answer questions.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Accuracy, the ability to recognize and identify, the various forms of bullying was recorded by looking at what was highlighted on the stories as well as the data on the data collection sheet. A 0 was given if the participants missed the incident of bullying, they did not recognize or identify the form of bullying. A 1 was given if the participant recognized in the story (highlighted it) but were unable to identify it. A 2 was given if the participant was able to recognize and identify the form of bullying.

A factorial analysis of variance was used to examine if accuracy was different between the two classes, CYWs and SSWs, and if there were differences between the types of bullying, cyber, emotional, exclusion, physical, racial, sexual, and verbal.

### Results

A 2 (class: CYW vs. SSW) x7 (bullying type: cyber vs. emotional vs. exclusion vs. physical vs. racial vs. sexual vs. verbal) between subject factorial ANOVA was used to assess if there were differences in accuracy of perceptions of bullying based on the types of students, the types of bullying, or some combination of these factors. It was predicted that CYWs would be

more accurate at recognizing and identifying various forms of bullying. Results indicate that there was no main effect of class,  $F(1, 3018) = 1.70, p > .05, \eta^2 = .001$  (CYW M = 1.16, SSW M = 1.06). It was also predicted that direct forms of bullying would be recognized at a higher rate than indirect forms of bullying. Results show that there was a main effect of type of bullying,  $F(6, 3018) = 46.43, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$ . There was also a significant interaction between class and the type of bullying,  $F(6, 3018) = 3.27, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$ . There was no significant effect due to the use of different scenarios, so this variable was removed from any further analyses.

A post hoc analysis, Tukey's HSD, was run to determine which types of bullying were more accurately identified (see Figure 1). Results of the Tukey's HSD analysis showed that cyber bullying was less accurately identified than exclusion and physical forms of bullying (see Table 1). It also showed that emotional forms of bullying were less accurately identified compared to exclusion, physical, verbal, and racial forms of bullying (see Table 1). As well exclusion is less accurately identified than physical and sexual forms of bullying refer to table 1. Lastly, it showed that physical forms of bullying were less accurately identified compared to sexual and verbal forms of bullying (see Table 1).

Although there was a significant main effect of type, there was an interaction between class and type of bullying (*mean difference* = .35,  $p < .05$ ). A simple main effect was run to see if CYW and SSW differed in any specific forms of bullying. There was only one significant effect and that was that CYWs are more accurate at perceiving exclusion than SSWs.  $F(1, 3018) = 26.29, p < .05, \eta^2 = .00$  (CYW M = 1.45, SSW M = 1.10) (see Figure 2).

### Discussion

There has been extensive focus on how perceptive teachers are to bullying; as most bullying happens within the schoolyard and teachers are the first line of defense against it. But

there are other professionals that deal directly and indirectly with children, and they can be valuable resources in the fight against bullying. This study looked at other professionals and their perception of bullying. Using written vignettes, Child and Youth Workers and Social Service Workers ability to recognize and identify various forms of bullying were tested.

It was predicated that CYWs would be more accurate at recognizing and identifying various forms of bullying than would SSWs. Results showed that there was not a significant difference between these groups. Both were accurate at recognizing the various forms of bullying within the stories, but both did extremely poorly at identifying the forms of bullying. This inability to identify the forms of bullying could have resulted because the curriculum for both courses does not include sufficient information for identifying various forms of bullying. It could be argued that the high rate of accuracy could be do to the fact the participants read stories, and reading about incidents of bullying is easier to recognize; this will be further discussed in future research.

It was also predicted that direct forms of bullying would be recognized and identified more than indirect forms of bullying. There was a main effect of type whereby it seems that the type of bullying did matter in how accurate participants were in recognizing and identifying forms of bullying. Within this study, physical, racial, and exclusion forms of bullying were recognized and identified more accurately compared to emotional, cyber, and sexual forms. These results are perhaps due to the fact that sexual, cyber, and emotional forms may be considered more indirect than the other forms of bullying. Some forms that they differed from verbal, exclusion, and racial which can be very indirect as well. It seems that the context in which a bullying incident happens can influence how direct or indirect an incidents.

There was also an interaction between the type of bullying and the type of student, CYWs are more accurate at recognizing and identifying incidents of exclusion. They may be more accurate recognizing and identifying forms of exclusion because the curriculum of this course focuses on group dynamics, and the importance of monitoring groups to be aware of exclusion. Further study into exclusion may show that the curriculum of both courses may impact how accurate students are at identifying and recognizing this form of bullying.

The main limitation of this study was that although several effects discussed were statistically significant, the size of the effects was actually quite modest (the research had a large amount of statistical power). Therefore, how impactful these differences would be in an applied context may be questioned. This is an issue because bullying rates are increasing and are having detrimental effects on the victims, so it is important to develop research that has applicability. Perhaps limiting the number of scenarios used or the number of bullying incidents presented would allow for an opportunity to examine whether these results would replicate with more modest power in the study. But this choice could have led to the participants recognizing and identifying all or none of the forms of bullying; resulting in no significant results.

For future studies the use of recording equipment and video taped skits should be considered. These skits should use age appropriate youth and be taped within the school setting. For example, in the lunchroom, having the camera person stand where teachers would stand and walk where teachers would walk. It is possible that realistic stimuli will greatly influence the results of this type of study. By using a recording device researchers can show how secretive bullying really is, and how easy it is to miss incidents of bullying.

The implications of this study further show the need to continue to educate future professionals about all forms of bullying. Once a student is a victim of bullying, chances are they

will continue to be a victim. Chronic bullying can have devastating effects on the victim such as low self-esteem, depression, isolation, anxiety, aggression towards others, and suicide (Bullying, 1997). It is because of these effects that research needs to have real world applicability, so that prevention and intervention programs can be developed to combat bullying.

## References

- Bauman, S., & Del Rio, A. (2006). Preservice teachers' responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 219-231.
- Bullying. (1997). *SDFS Notes*, 1-10.
- James, V. H., & Owens, L. D. (2005). 'They turned around like I Wasn't there': An analysis of teenage girls' letters about their peer conflicts. *School Psychology International, 26*(1), 71-88.
- Myers, D. (2004) *Psychology*. (7th ed.). New York : Worth Publishers.
- Owens, L., Slee, P., & Shute, R. (2000). 'It hurts a hell of a lot...': The effects of indirect aggression on teenage girls. *School Psychology International, 21*(4), 359-376.
- Ringrose, J. (2006). A new universal mean girl: Examining the discursive construction and social regulation of a new feminine pathology. *Feminism & Psychology, 16*(4), 405-424.
- Solberg, M. E., Olweus, D., & Endresen, I. M. (2007). Bullies and victims at school: Are they the same pupils? *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*(2), 441-464.
- Yoon, J. S., & Kerber, K. (2003). Bullying: Elementary teachers' attitudes and intervention strategies. *Research in Education, (69)*, 27-35.





## Appendix A

### Scenario 1: Female Victim

Being a kid is really hard nowadays all the pressure that is on you to excel at school, make friends, fit in, please your parents; it never ends. I had just bought a pair of Apple Bottom jeans, and I guess Sally was jealous or something. At lunch I went to sit with my friends and Sally put her bag in the empty chair and said “taken” let’s say I ended up sitting by myself. I could hear them laughing and giggling, and then Chad walked by (he is so hot!) and said “so your easy? Wanna come over tonight? My parents aren’t home.”

The rest of the day went by like always, slow. I had geography, history, and math in the afternoon; which made for a long long afternoon. When I got home my mom was out, so I just got something to eat and watched a rerun of the Hills. At supper my cell phone rang, I didn’t answer it because of the family rule – no phones during supper- which is alright. I forgot all about the call then I got a text message, it was from Sally. She said she was sorry; she was just having a bad day. I texted her back saying it was alright. I checked my voicemail “SLUT” – withheld number.

I really didn’t want to go to school the next day, I told my mom my stomach hurt but she said to get up and start to get ready that I would feel better. First period gym – my favorite class we are playing volleyball and I’m on the team so I’m pretty good. Second period French and pop quiz, third period music I play the sax. Then lunch I go to sit with my friends and Sarah said “we don’t sit with sluts” and they all giggled. She said it loud enough so the tables beside them could hear and they were all staring at me.

That night Sally came over to my house, and we had a long talk. After she left I noticed that my journal was missing, but I then... maybe I just misplaced it – I’m losing stuff all the time. The next day Sarah came up to me and said that if I didn’t write her history paper I would be sorry. I really didn’t know what she was talking about, what do I have to be sorry about? I didn’t write her paper and nothing bad happened. A few days later I was sent a link to a website, on the website was my entire journal; now the whole school could login and read it.

I guess nothing else could really go wrong.

## Appendix B

## Scenario 2: Male Victim

“FAG!” It doesn’t really bother me anymore after they stole my I-pod I just started to ignore them. I guess I just got use them calling me names, it happens every day. It is shitty to never get to never get picked to play basketball; I’m pretty good to I play in house league and was asked to play on the rep team.

Every year there is camping trip for school; my tent group consists of Tommy, Greg, and Travis. We have all been friends for a really long time, and are always camping buddies. We always sleep in the same order me, Travis, Tommy, and Greg. I came back from getting ready for bed and my sleeping bag was pushed to the opposite side of the tent; they all said everybody wanted their own space – but they all slept on the same side of the tent. They left without for the campfire and didn’t save me a seat, and when I asked to sit with them they said “no room” and went on talking; so I sat by myself.

It is shitty when you’ve had the same group of friends for years and things start to change. I fell and broke my ankle at school, it really hurt. Cry-baby was my new nickname, I just laughed it off. I mean I’m still friends with Tommy, Greg, and Travis I have known them for almost 10 years now, so when they tease me I just blow it off.

For awhile this asshole named Steve used to pick on me, he would punch me and trip me; and it was Tommy, Greg, and Travis that stuck up for me. “Pussy” is what they called me for a year after that; I guess I was.

One day I got a hard on in class, you really can’t help that shit it just happens sometimes. Travis and his big mouth, the whole class saw it. All the girls called me a pervert for months after. This one girl Kathy wouldn’t let it up, everyday in the hall she would push me and call me a pervert.

My mom just says to ignore it.

## Appendix C

### Scenario 3: Female Bully

So I moved from a big city to a small town when my dad got a new job. I was excited a new room, new friends, a new school. I meet a lot of good friends at school within the first week; I went to sleepovers and birthday parties.

One day at school this girl walked by and said "Porch Monkey." I didn't tell anybody about that, I mean some people are just uneducated and don't know any better. We are all the same under are skin. And besides nobody really likes her because she is a bitch. One day at school she got her period and we all pointed it out and nobody told her; it was the joke of the year.

We found out that she liked this boy named Todd (every girl had a crush on Todd), so we wrote her a note from Todd and we said that "I like you" and to meet him after school by his locker. She went up to him and made such a fool of herself.

Yeah looking back, something's that we did weren't super nice but BOG deserved everything. She could be mean, she wasn't all the time but if she wanted to she could be. She would be pretty if she wasn't so fat and sweaty; I might have even been friends with her. My mom insisted that I invite her to my birthday party, I was so embarrassed. We played truth or dare but nobody chose BOG. And when it came time to pick who we were sleeping beside we made her sleep at the far end by herself, none of us wanted to smell her.

At least she got invited to one birthday party.

## Appendix D

### Scenario 4: Male Bully-Bystander

George isn't like the rest of the guys, he's weak and fat and easy to pick on. One day after gym class in the change room we got in a circle and pushed him around, he ended up crying about the whole thing; suck it up princess. We all got this huge lecture on being nice to everybody, blah blah blah. That just made the guys more pissed, we missed recess over that?

So the next day we all played soccer, but nobody asked George he's too fat to play. There he sat on the sideline like a loser, and the whole class started to chant "PIGGY PIGGY OINK OINK!" Then a couple of the guys went and chased him around he fell and cried like always; one of the guys kicked him a couple times – that was a bit much. After that day I started to feel a bit sorry for George.

On the weekend I invited George over we played Call of Duty 4 and we shot some hoops. It was a pretty fun day, George is pretty funny. My mom asked why she has never met George before; I lied and said that he just moved here. My mom would be on the war path if she ever found out the stuff we do to George.

Monday George came over to say, my friends were all looking at me so I really had no choice. "Fuck off loser" Troy pushed him to the ground we all laughed and walked away. I mean I really didn't have a choice George is fun and all, but these are my boys. Troy asked me why George would ever come up and say hi to us, I played dumb. Later that night I called George and just told him at school we don't know each other.

George is pretty determined, he came back Tuesday and Jeff spat in his face, Wednesday Trevor stole his Celtics hat, Thursday Aaron got the class involved in tormenting him, and Friday the guys kicked the shit outta him.

We never saw George again after that week.



Table 1

Tukey's HSD Analysis of Accurate Identification of Bullying Incidents

Type	Cyber	Emotional	Exclusion	Physical	Sexual	Verbal	Racial
Cyber			MD= -.26*	MD= -.45*			
Emotional			MD= -.37*	MD= -.56*		MD= -.27*	MD= -.44*
Exclusion				MD= -.19*	MD= .23*		
Physical					MD= .42*	MD=.30*	
Sexual							
Verbal							
Racial							

\*indicates a significant mean difference (MD) at  $p < .05$

Figure Captions

*Figure 1. Identifying Bullying Incidents Based on Types of Bullying. Mean accuracy 0: Miss, 1: Recognized bullying incident in story, and 2: Recognized and identified bullying incident.*

*Figure 2. Identification of Bullying Incidents by CYWs and SSWs based on Type of Bullying. Mean accuracy 0: Miss, 1: Recognized bullying incident in story, and 2: Recognized and identified bullying incident.*

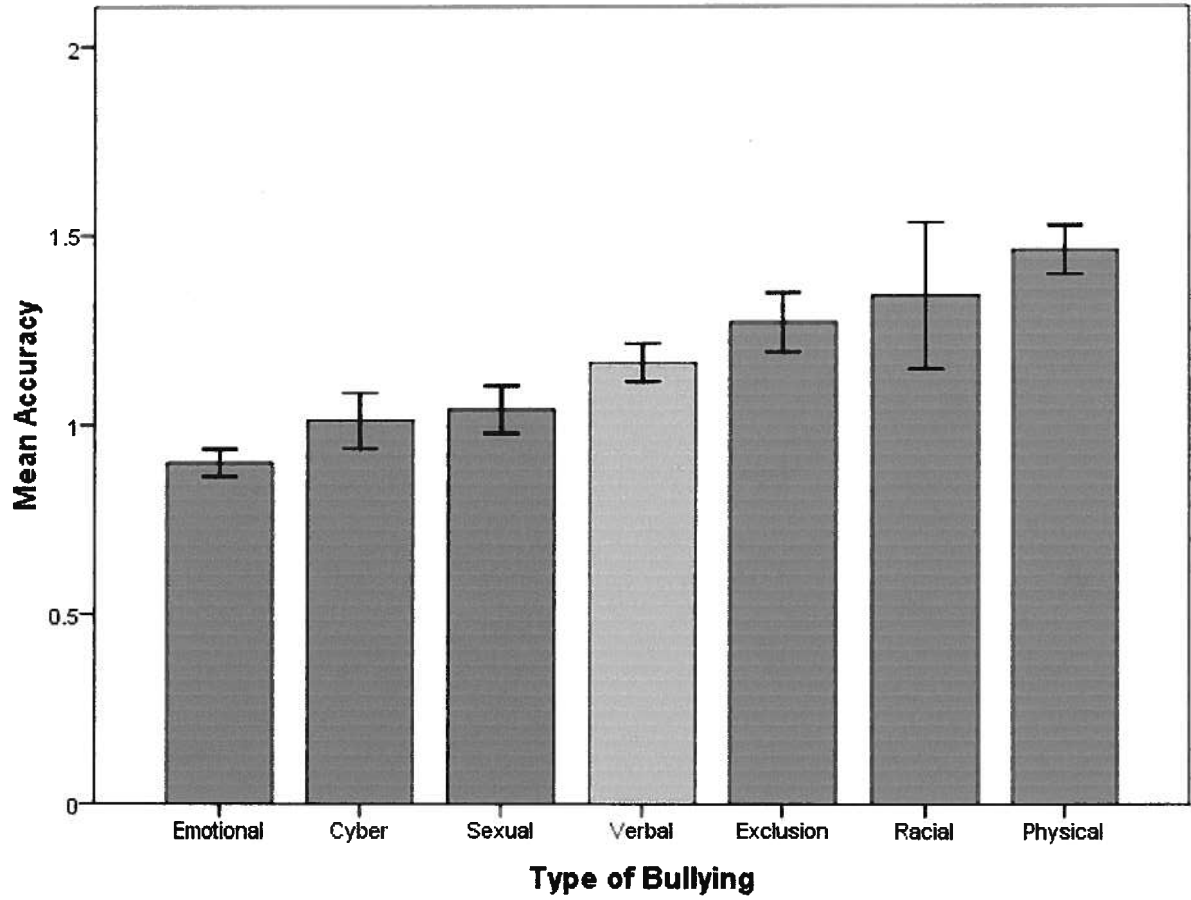


Figure 1



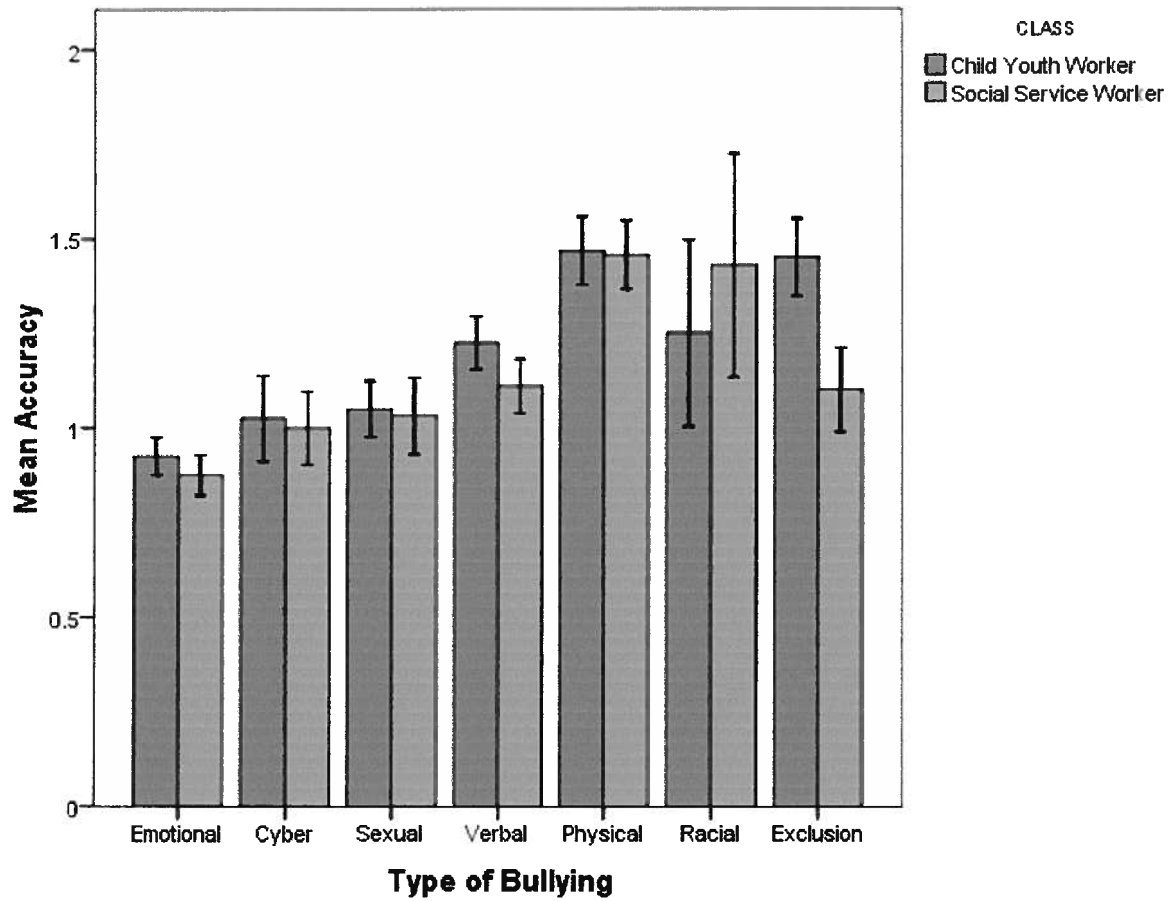


Figure 2