

# Development, Acceptability, and Short-Term Outcomes of a Parent Module for a Brief, Bullying Bystander Intervention for Middle School Students in Rural, Low-Income Communities

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# Pilot Grant

- We received NIMHD STTR/SBIR R41 Phase I (\$230K) and R42 Phase II (\$1.7M) grants to translate a brief bullying bystander intervention (STAC) into a technology-based format (STAC-T) for middle school students in rural schools.
- Goal of this pilot grant is to provide data to support a NIMHD STTR/SBIR R41/42 Fast Track proposal to develop the STAC-T Parent Module as a companion training, which will include a multi-site randomized trial rural schools.

# The Problem of Bullying

- Bullying peaks in middle school, with 28% of students reporting bullying victimization<sup>1</sup> and 33% reporting being cyberbullied.<sup>2</sup>
- Youth in rural communities are at higher risk than urban youth,<sup>3</sup> with 24% of rural youth reporting victimization compared to 20% of urban youth.<sup>4</sup>
- In rural communities victimization is associated with peer rejection, negative school experiences, and low school satisfaction,<sup>5</sup> as well as depression and anxiety.<sup>6</sup>
- Approximately 88% of students witness bullying as bystanders.<sup>7</sup>
- Witnessing bullying is associated with negative outcomes, including depression,<sup>8-15</sup> anxiety,<sup>10,12,16</sup> and somatic symptoms.<sup>10</sup>

# School Interventions

- Studies support the efficacy of comprehensive, school-wide programs<sup>15</sup> but these programs require significant resources.<sup>8,14,17-19</sup>
- Most programs do not include bystander interventions despite meta-analysis indicating they are important.<sup>20</sup>
- Rural, low-income schools have further obstacles for implementation<sup>21</sup> due to lower tax base to fund programs, training costs inflated by transportation needs related to bringing expert trainers to the school, frequent staff turnover with limited resources to re-establish expertise, school closures, staff overload and burnout, and lack of program advocates and local expertise in bullying prevention.<sup>22</sup>

# The STAC Program

- STAC<sup>23</sup> is a brief, bullying bystander intervention developed to train middle school students how to “defend” targets of bullying
- STAC stands for four bullying bystander intervention strategies:
  - “Stealing the Show”
  - “Turning it Over
  - “Accompanying Others”
  - “Coaching Compassion”
- 75-minute intervention followed by 2 bi-weekly boosters
- Data from studies in rural communities indicate:
  - Increases in knowledge, confidence, and use of the STAC strategies<sup>24-25</sup>
  - Reductions in bullying perpetration<sup>24</sup> and victimization<sup>24-25</sup>
  - Reductions in social anxiety,<sup>24</sup> depression,<sup>24,26</sup> and passive suicidal ideation relative to control students<sup>26</sup>

# Need for Parent Training

- Parents play a vital role in impacting bullying behaviors.
- Parental knowledge of bullying, beliefs about victimization, including blame attributions, and self-efficacy in managing bullying are inversely related to bullying.<sup>27</sup>
- Middle school students believe parents are indifferent and ineffective in addressing bullying;<sup>28</sup> however, when students do report to an adult, they most often report to parents (67%).<sup>29</sup>
- Several meta-analyses and literature reviews suggest that involving parents in bullying interventions decreases bullying,<sup>30-32</sup> but few interventions include parent education.<sup>33</sup>
- Research in rural communities indicate:
  - School personnel believe parental involvement in bullying intervention is important<sup>34,35</sup>
  - Parents recognize bullying as one of the most significant challenges youth face<sup>36</sup>
  - Engaging parents in training can be difficult<sup>22</sup>



# Purpose and Aims

- It is important to not only develop bullying education programs for parents, but to understand the unique challenges faced by parents in rural communities to reduce barriers for participation and increase engagement.
- **Goal**: To conduct formative research to inform the development of the STAC-T Parent Module by examining immediate training outcomes and program acceptability, as well as obtaining feedback about program content and delivery format to reduce implementation barriers and increase parental engagement.
  - **Aim 1**: Develop the content for the Parent Module based on our previous research with school personnel and the bullying literature.
  - **Aim 2**: Assess the need, feasibility, acceptability, delivery format preference and immediate outcomes (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behavioral intentions) of the STAC-T Parent Module.

# Aim 1

- Developed the content for the Parent Module based on our previous research with school personnel and the bullying literature
- The Parent Module is a 30-minute pre-recorded presentation including:
  - Normative feedback about bullying prevalence
  - Didactic information about bullying:
    - Definition
    - Types of bullying
    - Bystander roles
    - Associated negative consequences
  - Review of the student STAC strategies
  - Corresponding strategies parents can use to support students who act as “defenders”
  - Information about “perceptions vs. facts” about bullying:
    - Influence how parents respond when their child reports bullying to them
    - Teach parents strategies to encourage their child to act as a “defender”



## Questions About Bullying

3. When students report bullying to an adult, what percentage of students tell a parent? What percentage tell a teacher?

| Adult   | % Students Bullied Reporting the Location? |
|---------|--|
| Parent  | 67%  |
| Teacher | 53%  |

## Types of Bullying

### Physical

- Hurting someone's body or destroying their property
- "Shoulder checking," "backpack checking," and "tripping"



### Verbal

- Saying or writing mean things about someone
- Teasing, name calling, inappropriate comments, taunting, and threatening someone



### Socio-Emotional (or Relationship)

- Hurting someone's reputation or relationships
- Leaving someone out on purpose, spreading rumors, embarrassing or humiliating someone on purpose



### Cyberbullying

- Using electronic devices to hurt someone through text messages, social media, etc.

## Bystander Roles



## The STAC Strategies:

**S**tealing the Show

**T**urning it Over

**A**ccompanying Others

**C**oaching Compassion

## "Facts" vs. "Myths"

True or False? When children report bullying to parents, good advice is to ignore the situation, act aggressively, or retaliate.

## Why Are Parents Important?

When parents provide support to their children, their support serves as a buffer against depressive symptoms that are associated with bullying.<sup>33-34</sup>

Children tell their parents about bullying more often than they tell any other adult, including teachers.<sup>89</sup>

Research shows that when parents are involved in anti bullying programs offered by the school bullying decreases.<sup>34-36</sup>

## Aim 2

- Assess the need, feasibility, acceptability, delivery format preference and immediate outcomes (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behavioral intentions) of the STAC-T Parent Module.
- **Data Analysis**
  - Single group mixed-methods design
  - Quantitative:
    - Outcomes were fit with a linear mixed model with the fixed effect of Time (pre-test, post-test) and random effect of parents within schools
  - Qualitative:
    - Thematic, phenomenological analysis to capture participants' experiences and inductive approach for transcript coding and data interpretation<sup>37-38</sup>

## Aim 2

- **Participants**

- 23 parents from three public Title 1 middle schools in low-income, rural communities
- 21 (91.3%) females and 3 males (8.7%) ranging in age from 30-58 years old ( $M = 41.17$  and  $SD = 7.17$ ), with reported racial/ethnic backgrounds 78.3% White, 13% Hispanic, and 8.7% Other
- Of the 23 who completed the pre-test survey, 87% ( $n = 20$ ) completed the post-test survey
- Of the 20 parents who completed the immediate post-test, 60% ( $n = 12$ ; 100% female) signed up and participated in the focus group

## Aim 2 – Immediate Post Training Outcomes

### *Means, Standard Deviations, and Statistical Contrasts*

| Outcome   | Pre-Test<br>( <i>N</i> = 23) | Post-Test<br>( <i>N</i> = 20) | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
|   | Mean<br>( <i>SD</i> )        | Mean<br>( <i>SD</i> )         |          |           |          |                  |
| Knowledge and Confidence Supporting "Defenders" | 33.52<br>(3.90)              | 38.90<br>(4.36)               | 26.34    | 19.3      | .001***  | 1.20             |
| Confidence Intervening in Bullying              | 12.00<br>(2.00)              | 13.75<br>(1.21)               | 18.17    | 18.4      | .001***  | 1.06             |
| Comfort Intervening in Bullying                 | 11.04<br>(3.67)              | 13.70<br>(1.84)               | 13.25    | 19.5      | .001**   | 0.91             |
| Parental Role in Bullying                       | 12.17<br>(2.27)              | 13.95<br>(2.09)               | 16.65    | 20.2      | .001***  | 0.96             |
| Bullying Self-Efficacy                          | 20.44<br>(2.37)              | 22.50<br>(1.67)               | 17.87    | 21.2      | .001***  | 0.96             |
| Communication Self-Efficacy                     | 25.39<br>(3.01)              | 27.75<br>(2.27)               | 17.35    | 20.1      | .001***  | 0.96             |
| Bullying Attitudes                              | 24.22<br>(2.81)              | 25.65<br>(3.12)               | 5.61     | 19.3      | .03*     | 0.50             |

Note. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01 \*\*\**p* < .001.

## Aim 2 – Immediate Post Training Outcomes

### *Intention to Support Students Using STAC Strategies in the Future*

| Strategy            | % Agreement<br>(n = 20) |             |          |                   |               |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
|                     | Very Likely             | Likely      | Not Sure | Somewhat Unlikely | Very Unlikely |
| Stealing the Show   | <b>30.0</b>             | <b>40.0</b> | 30.0     | 0.0               | 0.0           |
| Turning it Over     | <b>55.0</b>             | <b>40.0</b> | 0.0      | 0.0               | 5.0           |
| Accompanying Others | <b>55.0</b>             | <b>35.0</b> | 0.0      | 5.0               | 0.0           |
| Coaching Compassion | <b>45.0</b>             | <b>50.0</b> | 5.0      | 0.0               | 0.0           |

## Aim 2 – Acceptability and Relevance

### *Agreement with Social Validity Items*

| Item  | % Agreement<br>( <i>n</i> = 20) |             |          |                   |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
|   | Strongly Agree                  | Agree       | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| The STAC Parent training was easy to understand.  | <b>55.0</b>                     | <b>45.0</b> | 0.0      | 0.0               |
| The STAC Parent training was useful.  | <b>35.0</b>                     | <b>55.0</b> | 10.0     | 0.0               |
| The STAC Parent training was interesting.   | <b>35.0</b>                     | <b>55.0</b> | 10.0     | 0.0               |
| The STAC Parent training information was relevant for middle school parents.            | <b>50.0</b>                     | <b>45.0</b> | 5.0      | 0.0               |
| The STAC Parent training examples of bullying were relevant for middle school teachers. | <b>40.0</b>                     | <b>60.0</b> | 0.0      | 0.0               |
| I learned something from the STAC Teacher training.                                     | <b>50.0</b>                     | <b>40.0</b> | 10.0     | 0.0               |
| I would recommend the STAC Teacher training to other teachers at my school.             | <b>55.0</b>                     | <b>40.5</b> | 5.0      | 0.0               |



## Aim 2 – Qualitative Findings

- **Positive aspects of the Parent Module**
  - Liked having a clear definition of bullying
  - Learning about the effects of bullying
  - Applicable examples
  - Overall thoroughness of the training
- **Relevance and appropriateness**
  - Useful, easy to understand, appropriate, and relevant for school and community
  - Liked multiple STAC strategies
  - Emphasis on parent-school collaboration
  - Program empowers parents to educate their adolescents about bullying

## Aim 2 – Qualitative Findings

- **Training feedback**
  - Time constraints and need for flexibility
  - Concerns about child becoming a target of bullying
  - Need for more parent training so parents can support adolescents
- **Information parents value**
  - Importance of fostering open communication
  - Need for parents to serve as role-models
  - Teaching compassion
- **Training need and current offerings**
  - Spanish version for rural communities
  - Need for student training
  - Not receiving previous training in this area

## Aim 2 – Qualitative Findings

- **Potential barriers**
  - Cost
  - Time
  - Internet access at home
  - Language barriers
  - Importance of buy-in
- **Online programming**
  - Practical – want to use phone
  - Include engaging and interactive training activities

# Summary and Future Directions

- Summary
  - We developed the STAC Parent Module
  - Preliminary data demonstrates acceptability, relevance, and need and increases in immediate post-training outcomes including knowledge, confidence, self-efficacy, responsibility, and anti-bullying attitudes, as well as parents' behavioral intentions to support their adolescents to utilize the STAC strategies
- Next Steps
  - Submit NIMHD STTR/SBIR R41/42 Fast Track (estimated date September 2024)



# Questions?

# Thank you!

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