Assessing Critical Thinking and Decision-Making as Contributors of Bullying and Victimization Among Youths

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A bully is one who “intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort on someone else,” while a victim is the one who endures said injury or discomfort (Olweus, 2003). Positive youth development programs often look at the cognitive processes associated with critical thinking and decision-making to learn why bullying occurs (Lerner et al., 2005). In this study, critical thinking and decision-making were assessed and examined as potential predictors of bullying and victimization. The objective of this study was to determine if critical thinking and decision-making among older children and young adolescents predicted bullying and victimization levels. We hypothesized that lower levels of critical thinking and decision-making would predict higher levels of bullying, and that lower levels of critical thinking and decision-making would also predict higher levels of victimization. The participants in this study were all enrolled in the Purdue Athletes Life Success Program (PALS), a 20-day summer camp for children from low-income families in Tippecanoe County, IN. On the third day of the program, participants completed a self-report survey assessing bullying, victimization, critical thinking, decision-making, and demographic characteristics. The hypotheses were tested using two multiple regression analyses. The regression model predicting bullying was significant and accounted for 9% of the variance in bullying behavior. Greater decision-making capabilities significantly predicted less bullying behavior, but critical thinking was not a significant predictor. The regression model with victimization as the dependent variable was not significant. The only hypotheses we can support at this time is that lower levels of decision-making predicts higher levels of bullying. This finding may help positive youth development programs to design stronger curriculums that focus on bettering decision-making skills to reduce levels of bullying. However, future studies may need to be conducted to discover any other underlying factors.