



SUPPORTING LATINO PARENTS IN ADDRESSING BULLYING AMONG LATINO YOUTH

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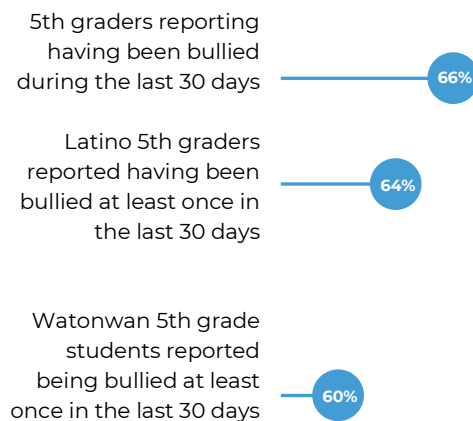
PROJECT BACKGROUND

Bullying is an act that still affects many people today and that has deep emotional long-lasting impacts. Bullying is defined as an act that happens “when someone aggressively uses their “power” to target another individual with repeated, unwanted words or actions. Those targeted are hurt either physically or emotionally and have a hard time stopping what is happening to them” (PACER Center, 2023). It is also considered a form of youth violence and an adverse childhood experience (ACE).

Bullying is also a very commonly reported discipline problem in public schools in America. Almost 14% of schools reported that bullying happens at least once a week, with the middle schools having the highest prevalence (28%). Bullying can also happen online; reports of cyberbullying among public school students in the United States are also highest for middle school (33%). (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

In Minnesota, according to the 2013-2022 Minnesota Student Survey Reports, more than 64% of 5th grade students reported having been bullied at least once during the last 30 days, and more than 20% of these students reported that this bullying occurred at least once a week, in the last month. In Minnesota, data corresponding to students of Latino or Hispanic origin show even higher numbers. More than 66% of these Hispanic or Latino students reported being bullied at least once in the last month, and more than 25% weekly or more.

The majority of 5th grade Latino youth report having been bullied at least once



For Watonwan County, there is no specific information about bullying of students of Hispanic or Latino origin. However, about 20% of 5th graders living in this county reported being bullied because of their race, ethnicity, or national origin.

METHODS

HACER conducted seven individual interviews with parents of middle schoolers students who identified as Latino in the cities of Madelia and St. James. Through these interviews, HACER collected information about bullying experiences and participants' needs and barriers to cope with bullying situations. Participants were recruited through in person and social media outreach. To participate in interviews, participants had to complete a registration form to determine if they were eligible to participate. Based on data collected, HACER, in partnership with Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS), and Minnesota National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) designed and carried out four workshops based on the findings from the interviews to educate parents and students about legal resources and therapeutic techniques to cope with bullying.

The interviews offered an opportunity for participants to share their family's stories. The interviews were conducted in Spanish with parents of students who have been intimidated or bullied in their schools. We define bullying as:

“Violent and intimidating conduct or behavior that is exercised verbally, physically, or psychologically. In this harassment, there is a power dynamic in which one individual humiliates another to feel superior. As a result, the victim feels fearful of their abusers and seeks to avoid them. Bullying is classified as harassment when it is so directed, severe, and repetitive that it hinders a student’s ability to learn, interferes with their rights, or harms their well-being. When bullying is done through social media or online, it is called cyberbullying.”

At the start of every interview, participants were presented with the definition to establish a collective understanding of what is meant by “bullying”. The questions focused on bullying experiences among the participants’ children and the responses and actions of the parents and schools. The questions centered around the types of bullying the children experienced, parental reactions, school involvement, changes in the students’ well-being and behavior, professional help, social media monitoring, and parental advice to other families. Overall, the questions aimed to explore the dynamics of bullying within the educational context, the support systems available to students and parents, and strategies for addressing and preventing bullying effectively.

¹ 2014 Minnesota Safe & Supportive Schools Act

FINDINGS

Parents with children that had received schooling outside of the U.S. perceived adaptation differently than parents of children who only received schooling in the U.S.

Most of the participants originated from Latin America and experienced a different educational system, with 3 out of 7 participants stating their children attended school in their home countries. For the parents whose children studied out of the country, the adaptation process of their children to the U.S. school system varied by individual. One parent identified an adaptation challenge for children from Central America because they feel that in the U.S., school attendance is perceived as a stronger commitment compared to their own home country. Another parent described that adaptation was easy and contributed this to the assistance provided by other parents to help their children adjust to the changes. **For the parents whose children did not study outside of the U.S., their perception of adapting was more positive.** Parents overall view the U.S. education system to be very good. One parent expressed their satisfaction with the free and quality education in the U.S. compared to their own experience in Mexico where the perception of the quality of education is based on the amount you pay for schooling.

When asked about their experiences with the U.S. school system, there were varying responses. Overall, participants reported a positive perception. One participant views the U.S. school system as “very good,” and showed appreciation for the diversity of students from different countries, but they also highlighted the language barriers experienced by Latino students. Another participant finds the school system to be comprehensive, but they feel there is a lack of parental involvement compared to their home country. The participant noted infrequent parent-teacher conferences and transportation challenges, but they also acknowledged positive aspects like sports and social clubs. Another participant noted differences in schools throughout the country, particularly in handling bullying between students. However, they found a more welcoming environment in another state with an emphasis on the supportive atmosphere of schools with a larger Latino population. Finally, a participant expressed a negative perception, criticizing schools for their inaction in addressing bullying situations.

Latino youth experienced a wide range of bullying, oftentimes for racial or cultural factors.

All interviewed participants shared an instance in which bullying took place. The bullying ranged from racial teasing and name-calling to physical assaults and cyberbullying. One participant worked in a school and noted that parents often do not know their children are being bullied until after an incident occurred. Four (4) of the 7 participants shared that their children were bullied due to their physical appearance, race and complexion, or language abilities. One participant shared that in Minnesota their daughter experienced racial bullying, which had not been experienced before in a different state. Another parent sought school intervention through a teacher where disciplinary actions were taken because the child was bullied due to her not being a fluent English-speaker and for her appearance. Two (2) of the 7 participants reported that their children were physically assaulted. On both occasions, parents sought the involvement of their local law enforcement. One parent shared that their child faced cyberbullying and physical assault due to wearing a sweatshirt with religious messaging relevant to their belief. The harassment initiated on social media included death threats and ended in assault.

Some Latino youth experience cyberbullying on Snapchat and TikTok.

Three (3) of the 7 parents shared that their children have experienced cyberbullying. Two (2) of the 3 incidents of cyberbullying were experienced on the social media platform Snapchat. A parent said that through Snapchat their child received taunts and threats. Another parent shared that their child experienced threats and harassment through Snapchat and TikTok. One parent also had their child receive threats through social media, initiated on Messenger Kids. Other parents said they are not aware of any cyberbullying taking place due to them not controlling their child's social media usage, suggesting a lack of awareness or communication regarding online interactions. One parent does not allow their child to have access to social media platforms, which limits exposure to cyberbullying.

Parents took a proactive approach to addressing bullying in schools, but results were mixed.

The parental responses to their children experiencing bullying or harassment at school revealed three major themes.

- First, **proactive parental intervention was present**; some parents immediately offered support upon noticing signs of distress in their children. The participant that worked in a school shared that if he notices any changes

in a student or if they communicate with him about any bullying, he tries to help.

- Second, there were **instances of legal intervention where parents contacted their local law enforcement**, either before or alongside school efforts to address the issue. Due to the school not taking immediate action to the child's assault, a participant went directly to her local law enforcement. In response, the aggressor was suspended for two days and there was a change in the aggressor's behavior. Another parent discussed seeking the authorities then talking about the bullying incident up to eight times with the school principal and there seemed to be no real solution, only a temporary one of two-weeks until the behavior continued.
- Third, the **effectiveness of school intervention varied**, some schools demonstrated prompt and successful resolutions through direct action, while others displayed indifference or inadequacy in addressing the situation. Another parent sought assistance in Spanish but received no help, so she attempted to reach out to the aggressor's parents and there was no resolution or behavior change. One parent did receive help from the school in which their children were moved to a different classroom, the aggressors were spoken to, and the situation changed.

Most participants expressed their frustration with the school's response to bullying incidents. A participant shared that there appeared not to be an established process for handling bullying in the school. Other schools may take the cases more seriously, but the actions taken are not communicated with the community. Three (3) of 7 participants said that their children's school did not respond, did not become involved, or did not take any action. The challenges shared by the participants, such as communication barriers, lack of established protocols, and inconsistent school responses underscored the need for greater awareness, communication, and support mechanisms to address bullying affectively in the school system.

A parent said that the school's reaction was that they could not do anything, as "it was just kids' stuff."

The effects of bullying manifested itself in physical, emotional, academic, and behavioral changes observed in the participants' children.

Many participants noticed their children have become socially withdrawn from their peers either because of fear, anxiety, or insecurity. A participant shared that the bullying had a profound academic impact on her child, which led to severe frustration, anger, social withdrawal, weight gain, and an anxiety diagnosis. Bullying also led another participant's child to fear a specific racial group because the aggressors belonged to a certain race. Another child experienced fear of attending school, wearing certain clothes, and encountering specific individuals. The school failed to address these behavioral changes, but their pediatrician did recognize the distress, although their referral to a psychologist was unsuccessful. A participant noted that the school's immediate response lessened the effect of bullying on their child because it prevented it from becoming constant. Another participant shared that the support from the child's parents, other parents, and the authorities led to a positive outcome that encouraged reporting and the rejection of such mistreatment.

Regarding seeking specialist help for children who have experienced the effects of bullying, some parents emphasized the importance of advocating for their children and actively seeking assistance. One parent described the effort made by the school to provide therapy, but it was not sufficient, leading to the decision to transfer the child to another school. In contrast, several participants noted the lack of initiative from the schools in offering support, with instances where the parents and pediatricians took the lead in seeking help from a specialist. Another parent shared a tragic story in which a classmate of their child took their own life and that was what triggered the school to address bullying. While some families have taken the initiative and attempted to seek support independently, others face challenges accessing specialists due to limited school resources, communication barriers, and financial constraints.

A participant shared that the school did not offer specialized help and due to their family not having health insurance, their child did not receive adequate support, leading to academic challenges.

Parents advise other parents that communication with the school is key.

Based on the participants' experience and insights, they were asked about the advice they would give to other parents on handling bullying incidents with their children. Most parents said that communication is important to establish with the schools. Some parents said it is up to the parents to communicate their needs,

other parents said it is up to the school to create better communication with parents to create space in which they can become more involved. A participant said that parents need to communicate more with their children to teach them to view differences as an advantage, not as a weakness. Another parent said to teach children at home that they should speak out and not feel less because they are immigrants. Many participants encouraged parents to speak up and be more involved with their children's schools. A participant shared that parents should act immediately against any situation to prevent anything from becoming worse or escalating. Overall, this advice from parents highlights the importance of proactive communication, collaboration, and immediate intervention on behalf of families and schools to address bullying effectively.

WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION

Data collected from interviews informed the design, organization, and facilitation of four online workshops aimed at promoting equitable access to educational opportunities for parents and students in Minnesota. The initial trio of workshops, conducted entirely in Spanish, was led by a lawyer affiliated with SMRLS and a staff member from HACER. The workshops are described below.

Workshop 1: Relevant laws to navigate bullying incidents within school environments

The first workshop, which attracted nine attendees recruited through outreach efforts in St. James and Mankato schools, community leaders, and parent liaisons, offered insights into legal services provided by SMRLS, with a focus on addressing bullying and cyberbullying's impacts on academic and personal performance. Attendees were also educated on relevant laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Safe & Supportive Schools Act of 2014, empowering them to effectively navigate bullying incidents within school environments. To incentivize participation, HACER provided attendees with gift cards sent via email, ensuring active engagement in the workshops. Participants reported increased knowledge in various topics at the end of the workshop compared to before the workshop.

Percentage of parents with at least some level of knowledge on the following topics (n=8)	Pre	Post
<i>School and community resources for dealing with bullying situations</i>	50%	→ 100%
<i>Signs and changes my child may show if facing bullying</i>	50%	→ 87.5%
<i>How to navigate the school system if my child has been a victim of bullying</i>	62.5%	→ 87.5%
<i>The effects of bullying on mental health</i>	37.5%	→ 75%
<i>Existing laws in the state of Minnesota related to bullying</i>	37.5%	→ 87.5%
<i>Laws in Minnesota related to discrimination</i>	37.5%	→ 87.5%

Workshop 2: Strategies to navigate bullying situations

The second workshop aimed to empower parents with the skills to identify signs of bullying affecting their children. Nine participants joined the session remotely via Zoom. Led by the lawyer affiliated with SMRLS, parents were equipped with essential strategies to navigate instances of physical or verbal abuse experienced by their children. To gauge the workshop's efficacy, a retroactive pre-post

knowledge survey was administered. Preliminary results highlighted a significant increase in

participants' understanding of identifying and addressing bullying situations, demonstrating the workshop's positive impact on parental awareness and preparedness. Similar to the first workshop, participants reported increased knowledge in various topics at the end of the workshop compared to before the workshop. Importantly, 100% of the participants said they felt safe to advocate for bullying situations in the community after attending the workshop, and that the most important thing they learned was the support resources available in schools, the community and the state government.

Percentage of parents with at least some level of knowledge on the following topics (n=4)	Pre	Post
<i>School and community resources for dealing with bullying situations</i>	50%	➔ 100%
<i>Signs and changes my child may show if facing bullying</i>	100%	➔ 100%
<i>How to navigate the school system if my child has been a victim of bullying</i>	75%	➔ 100%
<i>The effects of bullying on mental health</i>	100%	➔ 100%
<i>Existing laws in the state of Minnesota related to bullying</i>	75%	➔ 100%
<i>Laws in Minnesota related to discrimination</i>	75%	➔ 100%

Workshop 3: Minnesota laws on bullying

The third workshop, tailored for parents and their children, convened with a modest attendance of three participants. It became evident through parental feedback that their children harbored a sense of apprehension towards engaging in discussions within a parental framework. Despite the workshop's online format offering anonymity, the children opted out, reflecting the inherent challenges faced by victims of bullying in vocalizing their experiences. Facilitated by the affiliated lawyer from SMRLS and the educator from HACER, the session commenced with a comprehensive overview of Minnesota's legal framework concerning bullying, coupled with delineated protocols for parental and institutional intervention. Subsequently, participants collaborated in dissecting pertinent scenarios through video analyses, followed by conversations on optimal strategies for addressing similar situations. A retroactive pre-post survey was conducted at

Percentage of parents with at least some level of knowledge on the following topics (n=3)	Pre	Post
<i>School and community resources for dealing with bullying situations</i>	100%	➔ 33.3%
<i>Signs and changes my child may show if facing bullying</i>	100%	➔ 33.3%
<i>How to navigate the school system if my child has been a victim of bullying</i>	66.7%	➔ 66.7%
<i>The effects of bullying on mental health</i>	33.3%	➔ 66.7%
<i>Existing laws in the state of Minnesota related to bullying</i>	100%	➔ 100%
<i>Laws in Minnesota related to discrimination</i>	66.7%	➔ 100%

the end showing that a third of the participants reached the highest level of knowledge after attending the workshop while the other remaining two-thirds are divided between those who reached an intermediate level of knowledge and those who claimed to still know nothing or very little about. Regarding the feeling of safety in advocating for bullying situations in the community, one of the participants said he felt very safe, the other safe, and the last one not at all safe. About the most important thing learned in the workshop, the support resources available were the most frequent response.

Workshop 4: Mental health

The last workshop delved into crucial mental health discussions, led by a therapist affiliated with NAMI. Conducted online, the session drew participation from eight parents eager to gain insights into navigating the complexities of mental health, particularly in the aftermath of bullying incidents. With a focus on providing guidance, attendees were enlightened about the spectrum of mental health challenges that may emerge post-bullying, while also being equipped with valuable information on available resources. By focusing on providing guidance, the workshop effectively empowered parents with the necessary knowledge and tools to support their children through such trying circumstances. Subsequently, the eight self-identified Latino parents engaged in a retroactive pre-post knowledge survey, revealing a large increase in their understanding of the topic following their attendance at the workshop. After attending the workshop, 75% said the workshop had met their expectations and that they would recommend this workshop to others. More than 60% of participants agreed that the information was relevant and that it was presented with their culture in mind.

Percentage of parents with at least some level of knowledge on the following topics (n=8)	Pre	Post
<i>About mental health issues and illnesses</i>	13%	→ 75%
<i>Resources NAMI offers to families and individuals living with a mental illness</i>	0%	→ 90%
<i>Impact of negative attitudes about mental illness</i>	50%	→ 75%
<i>How to support a person with mental illness or what do in case of a crisis</i>	50%	→ 100%

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this project was to develop a series of culturally responsive workshops in partnership with other organizations (SMRLS, NAMI, and the Mankato Psychology Clinic PLC) to teach parents and students about how to address and cope with bullying. Workshops focused on legal services and therapeutic strategies to provide parents with resources to support their children when facing bullying situations. Individual interviews with parents were chosen because it was a method lacking in literature and the method offered an opportunity to deeply understand the experiences of bullying from the children of parents who identify as Latinos in some cities of Southern Minnesota (Mankato, Madelia, and Butterfield). The results obtained with this project made it possible to raise awareness of the difficulties parents may have when detecting, reporting and seeking help in bullying cases. The workshops improved the level of knowledge that the attendees had regarding a topic as sensitive as bullying. It also facilitated their access to resources to combat bullying, offered by various organizations such as schools, the State Health Department, and even bar associations.

Limitations

This project does not represent a generalizable conclusion on the issue, nor does it offer any solution to the bullying in schools. The results should be considered strictly under the detailed frame and circumstances, which supposes the necessity of further studies, expanding the number of participants, and the geographical area. Before considering future directions and suggestions for further studies related to bullying in the Latino Hispanic communities of Southern Minnesota, there are limitations that should be considered.

First, this research study was looking to include a sample size of 12 participants from the cities of Mankato, Madelia, and Butterfield. Due to the sensitivity of the topic and school regulations, it was difficult to connect with schools and parents. Mankato and St. James were more open to supporting the project by providing HACER the opportunity of inviting parents to participate in the interviews and workshops in their Open House events. However, Butterfield did not respond to the invitation, and it was difficult to schedule appointments with teachers, counselors, and cultural liaisons of Butterfield schools. Given the lack of response from Butterfield schools, HACER decided to reduce the number of interview participants to seven.

Participation criteria such as grade (6th-8th) and location (Mankato, Madelia, and Butterfield) caused a challenge of recruitment. HACER found many people who wanted to participate; but their kids were in other grades or studied in schools outside of these three locations. Due to the topic sensitivity, students did not feel comfortable participating in the workshops. Two out of four workshops offered were meant to create spaces where parents and students worked together to learn about legal resources and therapeutic tools to cope with bullying. However, only one student decided to participate in the third workshop addressed to parents and students. Based on this experience, HACER decided to respect students' wishes and addressed the other workshops only to parents.

Recommendations

Remaining vigilant is crucial for identifying instances of bullying. Workshops of this nature assist parents in recognizing and staying attentive to any shifts in their children's behavior that could signal bullying. Thus, it's advised to persist in organizing such activities, engaging both parents and students. These workshops not only facilitate learning but also provide a platform for individuals to voice their concerns and uncertainties regarding bullying.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Consolidated Communications Community, Mankato Clinic, and Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation for their generous support, which has been instrumental in advancing our research project on bullying.

Through their invaluable contributions, we have been able to conduct comprehensive studies aimed at fostering a safer and more inclusive environment for children and youth in the Madelia, St. James, and Mankato areas.

Their donations have facilitated the various phases of our research, enabling us to gather crucial information on bullying experiences and the needs and challenges faced by participants in coping with such situations. The belief of these foundations and organizations in our project's objectives not only provided financial assistance for impactful workshops but also served as a strong endorsement of our endeavors.

We deeply appreciate the trust placed in us and the shared commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of young individuals and their families. The funds received have been utilized to develop interviews and workshops focused on raising awareness of bullying and preventing its occurrence. These programs have reached approximately 40 parents and students across the three locations, empowering them with legal and mental health knowledge to address bullying effectively.

HACER takes pride in prominently featuring the logos of our founders and partners in all our publicity materials, including newsletters, flyers, presentations, and social media platforms. This visibility not only acknowledges their significant support but also helps raise awareness of the crucial role played by funders and partners in supporting initiatives within the self-identified Latino Hispanic community.

Once again, we express our heartfelt gratitude for your generosity, partnership, and unwavering dedication to creating a safer and more compassionate environment for our youth. We eagerly anticipate continuing this meaningful journey together.

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