



# Bullying Experiences of Adolescents with Down Syndrome: A Case Study

Cynde Katherine Josol, Katie Cwiakala, Rachel Wellings, Jessica Douglas, & Marisa H. Fisher, PhD

Michigan State University

## 1 Introduction

- Adolescents with disabilities report higher levels of bullying victimization than adolescents without disabilities (Rose et al., 2011)
- Those with intellectual disability (ID) are at greatest risk of experiencing bullying victimization (56.7%), compared to 10.6% of those without disabilities (Sterzing et al., 2012)
- Little research has examined the experience of bullying for individuals with specific forms of ID conditions (Fisher, Moskowitz, & Hodapp, 2013)
- There is some evidence that the unique social behavioral profile of individuals with Down syndrome (DS) may serve as a protective factor from bullying victimization (Fisher et al., 2013)
- Unable to find any research specifically examining the bullying experience of individuals with DS


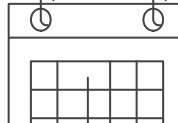


## 2 Objective

- To explore the lived bullying experiences of two adolescents with Down syndrome to better their understand bullying experiences
- To compare parent report and adolescent report of bullying experiences

## 3 Method

- One on one semi-structured interviews
- Thematic analysis to identify themes
- Inductive content analysis: (a) read transcripts; (b) create coding framework; and (c) code transcripts and revise framework
- Parent questionnaire & interview about bullying

## 4 Participants

	Participant 1	Participant 2
 Gender	male	female
 Age	13 years, 4 months	15 years, 10 months
 Family SES	> \$100,000	\$15,000- \$29,000
 Educational placement	Resource/self-contained	Inclusion/self-contained

## 5 Preliminary Themes from Child Interviews

### #1: Recognize different types of bullying

Interviewer: "But what does teasing mean?"  
P1: "Because... call names."

P2: "Well some of them (unintelligible) punched on me everywhere and he punched me."

### #4: May also be perpetrator of verbal bullying

Interviewer: "He calls you stupid? When did that happen?"  
P1: "Because I called him weirdo."  
Interviewer: "You called him a weirdo?"  
P1: "Yeah."

### #2: Clubs/Groups can serve as buffer for bullying

Interviewer: "And are they [kids in band] all nice to you?"  
P1: "Yes, all nice...there's no fights."

### #3: Question interpretation differs, leading to unclear answers

Interviewer: "Yeah, I would feel mad, too. Was that the only time that happened?"  
P1: "Maybe, not sort of."  
Interviewer: "A few times?"  
P1: "I think zero times."

### #5: Individual peers may serve as protective factor against bullying

P2: "Someone (unintelligible) to hurt me but [Brady] is strong and was like, "Noo, just go home and go to your momma...[Brady], he is my hero."

## 6 Results

- Themes and patterns coded from the interviews demonstrated that the bullying experiences varied for both adolescents with DS
- Both participants reported experiencing verbal or physical bullying, such as punching and name-calling
- **Participant 1** described instances with different question interpretation, leading to unclear answers about the frequency of his bullying experiences.
  - He indicated that he was called names and his mother confirmed this report
  - His mother indicated that he is often teased and made fun of by peers and is often left out of social events, though he did not discuss this
  - Coding indicated that he could also be a perpetrator of verbal bullying through name-calling
- **Participant 2** provided details about bullying experiences and the ways people stood up for her
  - She indicated that people called her names
  - She said her boyfriend stood up for her
  - Her mother, on the other hand, reported that peers often made fun of her and left her out on purpose
- Both adolescents seemed to conflate some situations as bullying when they were not
  - e.g., Participant 2 described peers using bad language as bullying

## 7 Discussion

- More research is needed to understand bullying experience of individuals with DS
- Parents might identify bullying more often than those with DS
  - Interventions to help individuals with DS to identify and respond to bullying are needed