

The Development of a Bullying Assessment for Autistic Adolescents

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Positionality Statement



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Uniform Definition of Bullying

- Any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths (who are not siblings or current dating partners) that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm (Gladden et al, 2014, pp. 7).

Type of Bullying	Definition	Examples
Physical	Physical force by the perpetrator against the targeted youth	Hitting, kicking, punching, spitting on, tripping, pushing
Verbal	Oral or written communication by the perpetrator against the targeted youth that causes the victim harm	Taunting, name calling, teasing, threatening or offensive notes or hand gestures, intimidation
Relational	Behaviors by a perpetrator designed to harm the reputation or relationships of the targeted youth	Shunning, purposeful efforts to isolate, spreading false or harmful rumors
Damage to Property	Theft, alteration, or damaging of the target youth's property by the perpetrator to cause harm	Taking personal property and refusing to give it back, destroying property

Social Experiences of Autistic Adolescents

- Adolescents with autism more likely to experience bullying victimization than
 - those without disabilities
 - those with other disabilities (Park et al., 2020)
- Heterogeneity in measurement of bullying and subsequent results (Park et al., 2020)
- Reports are often based on
 - proxy-reports
 - self-report measures that were
 - not developed for autistic adolescents
 - not adapted to be understood by autistic students
- Current estimates and reported experiences of bullying may be inaccurate



PURPOSE

- 1) To develop and validate a self-report bullying questionnaire for autistic middle school students**
- 2) explore and describe the bullying experiences of autistic adolescents**



EXPLORATORY SEQUENTIAL MIXED METHOD STUDY

Qualitative

• Research Questions

- RQ 1: Do autistic adolescents and their parents define and describe bullying victimization differently?
- RQ2: If there are differences, what factors might account for the discrepancies between adolescent and parent reports of bullying?

• Procedures:

- ($n = 18$) semi-structured interviews with parents and autistic students
 - Age: 12.44 (1.25)
 - Reported sex: 4 female, 14 male

• Data analysis

- Thematic coding

• Themes:

- RQ1:
 - (a) adolescents focused on direct types of bullying;
 - (b) parents focused on indirect types of bullying.
- RQ2:
 - (c) the adolescent provided an inconsistent narrative;
 - (d) the parents saw the impact of the adolescents' disability on their bullying experiences.

Instrument Development

• Research Questions

- RQ 1: What instrument can be developed from the qualitative exploration to assess the self-reported bullying experiences of autistic youth?
- RQ 2: In which format should the instrument be delivered?

• Procedures:

- Consider participants' language and description of bullying to include in the assessment
- Write bullying scenarios for each subscale
- Develop response scale
- Review assessment with Delphi expert panel
- Pilot testing
- Instrument refinement

• Products:

- Bullying Assessment
 - 16 items across 4 subscales

Quantitative

• Research Questions

- RQ 1: What is the validity of the self-report bullying instrument?
- RQ 2: Can autistic students accurately respond to the questions on the assessment?

• Procedures:

- 22 students with ASD
 - Bullying assessment
- 22 parents
 - Survey including demographics, bullying, social skills

• Data Analysis:

- Numerical item scores
- Scale reliability
- Factor analysis

Iterative Measure Development

Adapt and pilot currently existing self-report bullying measures

- Adolescents were unable to use written measure and rating scale

Interviews with parents and autistic adolescents

- Identified specific bullying examples
- Coded and used language/experiences to develop new assessment

Wrote vignettes of bullying scenarios, using findings from interviews

Panel reviewed and provided feedback

Created cartoon videos of each vignette

Piloted with 5 autistic adolescents

- First person perspective was confusing

Adapted based on feedback

Final Version of the Self-Report Bullying Assessment

Four types of bullying

Physical

Verbal

Relational

Property Damage

Four common locations

Bus

Hallway

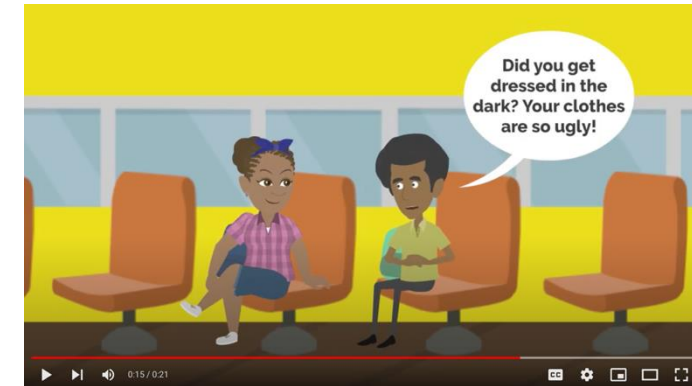
Lunchroom

Outside the school

- Physical: Lunchroom



- Verbal: Bus



- Relational: Outside



- Property Damage: Hallway



Physical Bullying in the Hallway



Verbal Bullying on the Bus



Relational Bullying Outside of School



Property Damage in the Lunchroom



Research Questions

Is the bullying assessment an effective way to assess bullying for autistic adolescents?



What are the most frequent types and locations of bullying experiences reported by autistic adolescents?



How do adolescents describe their bullying experiences?

Participants and Procedure

- 22 autistic adolescents
 - Age
 - 12.28 (1.01); range: 10-14
 - Reported sex
 - 20 male; 2 female
 - Reported race and ethnicity
 - 15 White; 6 Hispanic; 6 Mixed race
 - Full Scale IQ
 - 94.52 (20.29); range: 44-125
 - Education
 - 5th through 8th grade
 - 21 receiving special education through IEP or 504
 - 14 (63.6%) spent 80-100% of time in general education classroom
 - 1 (4.5%) spend 80-100% of time in special education classroom

Procedure

- Met over zoom, watched vignette using screen share, then asked:
 - *Have you ever experienced something like this at school?*
 - Yes / No / Sort Of
 - *Has this happened to you more than once?*
 - Yes / No
 - *How often does this happen?*
 - Every day / A few days a week / A few days a month / A few days a year / Never
- 1-2 weeks later, met again and repeated assessment, also asked:
 - *Tell me more about that experience*

RQ1: Is it a reliable assessment?

- 1. Recoded *Have you ever experienced something like this at school?* Into 1 or 0
 - Sort of = yes = 1 No = 0
- 2. Conducted Fisher's Exact Test for the 4 items for each scale

	Cronbach Alpha T1	Cronbach Alpha T2
Physical	.705	.692
Verbal	.615	.612
Relational	.744	.617
Property Damage	.728	.603

- 3. Looked for differences from Time 1 to Time 2
 - No differences

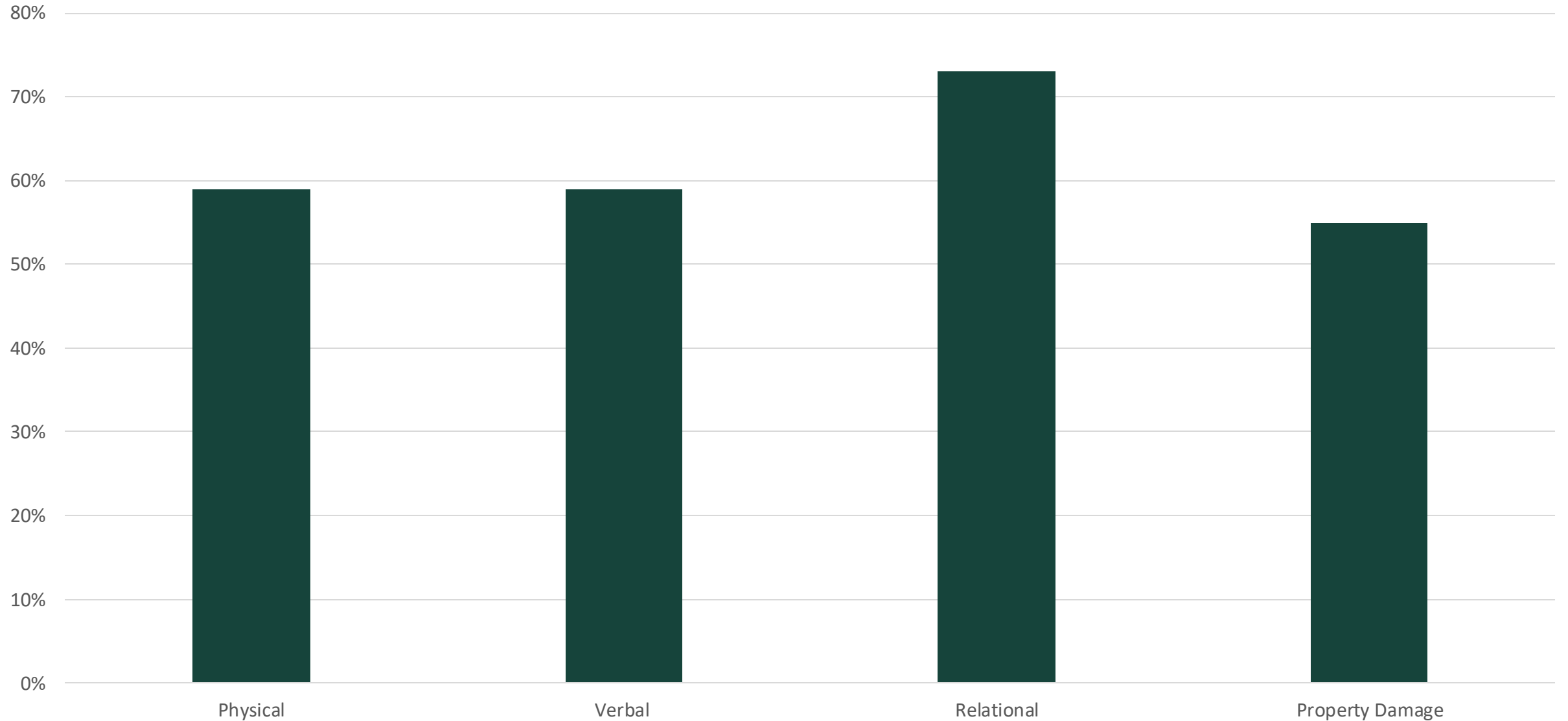
RQ1: Is it a reliable assessment?

- 4. Examined correspondence between 3 questions:
 - (1) *Have you ever experienced something like this at school?;*
 - (2) *Has this happened more than once?;*
 - (3) *Tell me more about that experience.*

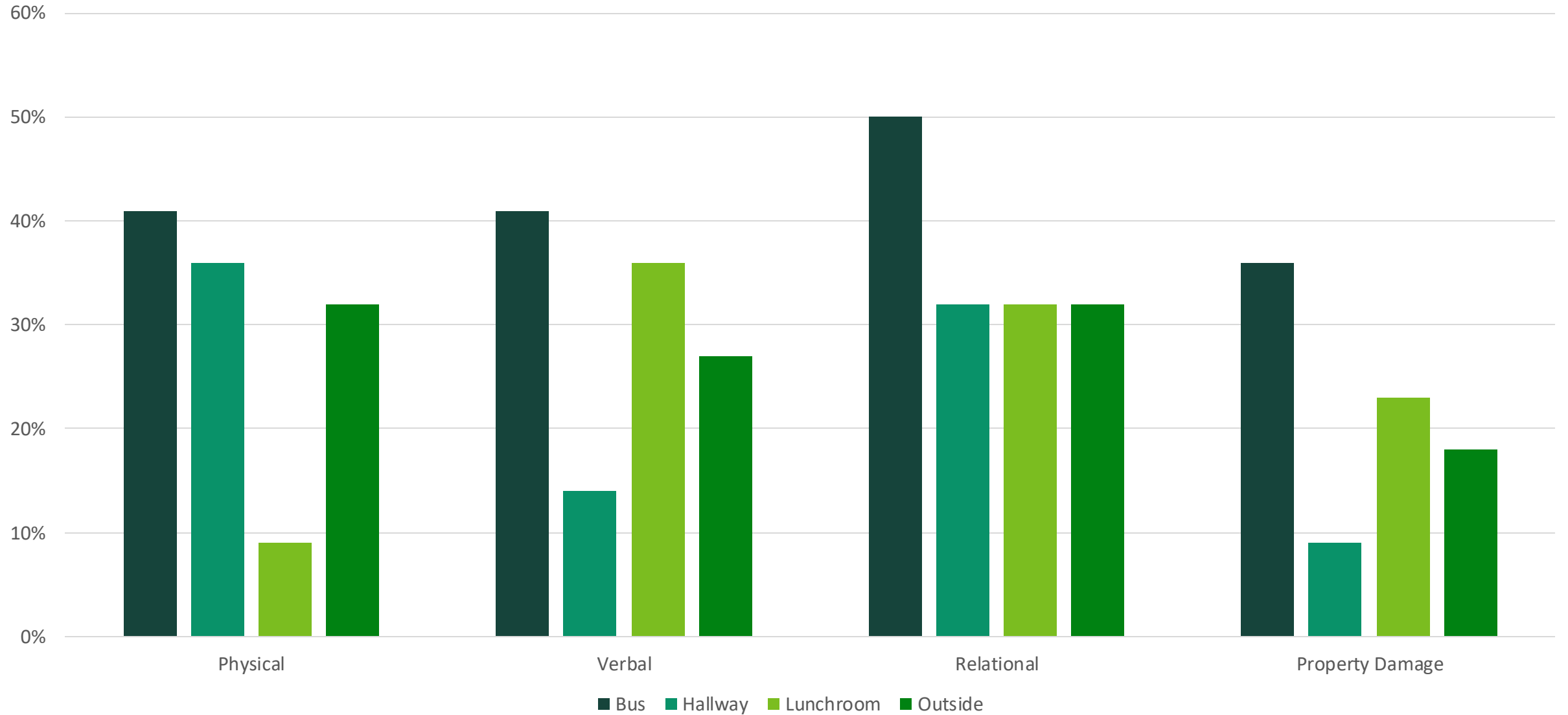
Consistency of Responses	Number of Responses	Percentage
Full Correspondence (3/3)	309	87.78%
Partial Correspondence (2/3)	17	4.83%
No Correspondence	8	2.27%
Description not bullying	18	5.11%

- 5 participants had 100% correspondence across all 16 scenarios
- 5/17 of partially corresponding responses related to relational bullying
- 10/18 of responses that did not describe bullying related to physical bullying
- 1 participant accounted for 5 of the not corresponding or applicable responses
- 1 participant accounted for 7 of the not corresponding responses or responses that did not describe bullying

RQ2: Percent of Participants to Experience Each Type of Bullying



RQ2: Percent of Participants to Endorse Each Type of Bullying in Each Location



RQ3: Representative Quotes

Physical Bullying

- “Kid bullies me, punches and shoves, day to day”
- “I was walking in the hallway in 4th/5th grade, and a kid put their foot out and tripped me over.”

Relational Bullying

- “8th grader makes fun behind my back because talking about bugs during recess/lunch; don’t hear it everyday but other people say they are talking”
- “After the last day of school, I wasn't at the carnival with friends. I cried. I wasn’t invited.”
- “Someone lied about me showing my private parts.”

Verbal Bullying

- “Most of the time they just get physical (beat the crap out of me). They call me smelly and stinky. They call me a nerd and gay.”
- “Weirdo”

Property Damage

- “In 2nd grade, someone ripped my homework in half.”
- “Happened one time; doing a poster for school and put some gum balls on the poster and a bunch of a kids took a bunch of gum balls and by the end of the school didn't have any”

Bullying Type Frequency:

- Adolescents report experiencing all types of bullying
- Adolescents were able to give examples of the types of bullying they reported experiencing

Location Frequency:

- The most frequent and severe bullying experiences occur in less supervised locations (e.g., bus, outside of school)
- Although unsupervised locations were the most frequent, bullying occurred in all locations
- Relational bullying was most consistent across locations and often focused on feeling left out or ridiculed by peers

Discussion

- Video vignettes of bullying experiences helped autistic adolescents *recognize* and *talk about* their own experiences with bullying
- Most responses corresponded with description of bullying
 - Assessment is likely an accurate way to assess bullying in this population
- Adolescents experienced all types of bullying in several school locations
 - Able to give examples of the types of bullying they reported experiencing
 - Most frequent and severe bullying experiences occur in less supervised locations (e.g., bus, outside of school).
 - Relational bullying most consistent across locations and often focused on feeling left out or ridiculed by peers.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Small sample size and data collected over zoom
 - Increase recruitment
 - Assess in person
 - Assess without support
- Not a diverse sample
 - Include autistic students of different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds
 - Include autistic students with co-occurring intellectual disability
- Additional research should examine the utility of the self-report bullying assessment in identifying bullying
- Determine how the assessment can be used to identify and address bullying
- Examine how bullying impacts school performance and mental health

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