

# Journal of Relationships Research

<http://journals.cambridge.org/JRR>

Additional services for ***Journal of Relationships Research***:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## Effect of the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* Program on Children's Response to Bullying

Zoe Markopoulos and Michael E. Bernard

Journal of Relationships Research / Volume 6 / January 2015 / e13

DOI: 10.1017/jrr.2015.9, Published online: 26 November 2015

Link to this article: [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S1838095615000098](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1838095615000098)

### How to cite this article:

Zoe Markopoulos and Michael E. Bernard (2015). Effect of the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* Program on Children's Response to Bullying. *Journal of Relationships Research*, 6, e13 doi:10.1017/jrr.2015.9

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

# Effect of the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* Program on Children's Response to Bullying

Zoe Markopoulos and Michael E. Bernard  
The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

This study evaluated the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* program (Bernard, 2012), which is designed to teach children the ideas espoused in the practice of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) to employ in response to bullying. Self-report data were collected at pre- and post-test of children's cognitive, behavioural, and emotional coping responses to four written bullying vignettes. At pre-test, children's personal qualities of intrinsic resiliency were also measured. The sample consisted of 139 participants in Melbourne, Australia ( $n = 80$  in the experimental group and  $n = 59$  in the control group), aged from 10 to 14 years. Results indicated children in the experimental group improved in cognitive and emotional coping responses relative to children in the control group. Females showed greater improvement than males in coping responses to bullying as a consequence of the intervention. Entering levels of intrinsic resiliency did not moderate the effects of the intervention program on children's coping responses. The cognitive and emotional coping responses of females to bullying vignettes (pre-test) were significantly more negative and emotionally intense than males. The implications of these findings are discussed, as well as limitations and directions for future research.

■ **Keywords:** program evaluation, bullying, coping responses, children, schools

Bullying is not a new phenomenon; however, because of its high prevalence and harmful effects it has commanded increased research attention (Hensley, 2013). Research suggests bullying is positively associated with depression and anxiety in both males and females (Farrow & Fox, 2011). The experience of bullying is also likely to contribute to the way in which children approach their relationships in life. As an example, victims of bullying may be reluctant to trust their peers or may withdraw from social situations in an attempt to avoid the pain that bullying inflicts (Rigby, 2013; Society for Research in Child Development, 2008). Approximately one in ten children who are bullied at school can experience mental and physical health problems in the short or long term as a result of bullying (Rigby, 1999).

Bullying has been defined in various ways; however, for the purpose of this study, bullying is characterised as repeated and intentional negative acts that involve an imbalance of power, such that it is difficult for the victim to defend him or herself (Olweus, 1993). In Australia, one study revealed 27% of Grade 4 to Year 9 children report being bullied every few weeks or more during a school term (Cross et al., 2009). Figures provided by Kids Help

Line (2009) suggest children aged from 10 to 14 years report school-related bullying as a primary concern.

Research continues to reveal children's coping responses play an important role in dealing with bullying. For the purpose of this study, coping represents the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional efforts undertaken by children to manage bullying, with the goal of successful adaptation to these challenging experiences. In a study conducted by Spence, Young, Toon, and Bond (2009), the results suggest high levels of victimisation are associated with emotional dysregulation of anger and sadness. Furthermore, research suggests strengthening coping responses through educational interventions is associated with children's greater ability to deal with bullying (e.g., Cross et al., 2011).

Gender differences have been found in the types of bullying behaviour demonstrated and in the types of coping responses children employ. Craig et al. (2009) suggest

---

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Zoe Markopoulos,  
The University of Melbourne, Parkville VIC 3010, Australia.  
Email: z.markopoulos@gmail.com

males are more likely than females to be both a bully and victim. Among males, physical bullying is more common, while verbal and social bullying is more common among females (Rigby, 2007). Naylor, Cowie, and Rey (2001) found by Year 9 the reported bullying rate for females was almost twice that for males.

Naylor et al. (2001) found females were more likely to tell someone (either an adult or peer) compared to males, which is consistent with the results obtained by Hunter, Boyle, and Warden (2004). Machmutow, Perren, Sticca, and Alsaker (2012) found females more frequently favoured assertiveness and close support, and less frequently recommended retaliation as a coping response than males. Males recommended retaliation more often than females. Frydenberg and Lewis (2000) reported males tend to pursue relaxing diversions or physical recreation, ignore the problem and keep it to themselves, while females tend to engage in tension reduction, self-blame strategies and worry. It is important to ascertain how gender affects the utility of the program being evaluated, as it is clear that the coping responses utilised can be explained by a child's gender.

Investigating factors that can mitigate or exacerbate children's responses to bullying can suggest approaches in which schools can increase positive development (Brownlee et al., 2013). Resilience is a personal trait and attribute that allows some children to respond more effectively than others to adversity (Prince-Embury, 2006). Resiliency factors can be related to individual characteristics (intrinsic) or to the family and social context (extrinsic). This research is focused on children's intrinsic resiliency characteristics, such as sense of mastery and emotional reactivity. These two factors involve a number of underlying constructs, such as self-efficacy and emotionality, which have emerged as two important constructs in bullying. Resilience was investigated as a possible mediator of program effectiveness and not as a variable that would be influenced by the program (intervention).

Self-efficacy has been linked with behaviours related to bullying, such as confidence to utilise particular coping strategies (Putter, 2007). Furthermore, bullying can cause a range of emotional reactions, given its emotionally arousing nature. Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) found children who reported they were more likely to respond to peer provocation with anger choose revenge-seeking responses, and were less likely to seek advice or engage in conflict resolution.

A variety of intervention programs have been developed for use in school settings; for example, the Olweus Bullying Program (Olweus, 1993) and Friendly Schools (Cross et al., 2003). However, despite these programs and their beneficial effects, bullying remains a prominent problem in schools. A review of the literature reported below includes some studies that have investigated gender differences in relation to program efficacy and factors that can change over time.

An examination of the impact of cognitive-behavioural and coping skill programs with children has shown that in a proportion of studies, males and females often respond differently to the same programs. Pahl and Barrett (2010) examined the effectiveness of the Fun Friends (Barrett, 2007) program that is designed to increase social-emotional competence, and decrease and prevent worry and emotional distress. At post-intervention and at 12-month follow-up, both males and females within the intervention group improved on anxiety (effect size = .14). In the intervention group, improvements were also found in behavioural inhibition and in social-emotional skills (e.g., emotion regulation and social skills), with females experiencing the largest improvement from pre- to post-intervention. Koegl, Farrington, Augimeri, and Day (2008) examined the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioural intervention program, Stop Now And Plan (SNAP) Under 12 Outreach Project (Earls Court Child and Family Centre, 2001) for children who display aggressive and antisocial behaviour problems. The results showed decreases in delinquency (slightly greater for females) and minor aggression (greater for males) scores (Koegl et al., 2008).

A promising approach to empowering children to respond more effectively to bullying is through the Bullying: The Power to Cope program. The program is based on rational emotive behavioural therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1994) and rational emotive education (REE; Knaus, 1974). It specifically aims to aid how children handle being a victim of bullying in a number of ways. Based on the extensive research on the efficacy of REBT and REE on children and adolescents with and without clinical problems (e.g., Bernard, Ellis & Terjesen, 2006; Hajzler & Bernard, 1991), the program teaches children the ideas espoused in the practice of REBT; for example, 'things are neither good or bad but thinking makes it so', emotional responses to bullying can vary from strong to weak, choosing to think rational rather than irrational thoughts ('this is not the end of the world') and self-acceptance ('I accept myself no matter what'). The Bullying: The Power to Cope program differs from other programs (e.g., Fun Friends, SNAP) through its heavy emphasis on cognitive interpretation and change, while sharing similar teachings of specific coping skills (actions to take) in response to bullying.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the Bullying: The Power to Cope program. There was also interest on whether gender as well as children's intrinsic resiliency explains the impact of the program being evaluated in this study. The research questions pertaining to this study are:

1. Do children who participate in the Bullying: The Power to Cope program show improvement in coping responses (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional) to

- bullying vignettes in comparison to children who do not participate?
2. Do males and females respond differently to the Bullying: The Power to Cope program in terms of coping responses (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional) to bullying vignettes?
  3. Do children's entering levels of intrinsic resiliency (sense of mastery and emotional reactivity) moderate their coping responses (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional) to bullying vignettes in response to the Bullying: The Power to Cope program?

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of children in Grade 5 ( $n = 53$ ) and Grade 6 ( $n = 86$ ) who were selected from three schools in Melbourne, Australia. The schools yielded 182 children who were all invited to take part in the study. Of these children, 143 (78.57%) returned the parent and child consent forms and completed pre-test assessment. At post-test assessment the sample comprised of 139 children, with four of the participants having left the school before completion of the project. Therefore, the final sample comprised of 139 children (71 males and 68 females), with 80 children in the experimental group and 59 children in the control group. Participants were aged from 10 to 14 years ( $M = 10.79$ ,  $SD = .65$ ).

### Materials

#### Coping response

Despite the existence of several coping and bullying questionnaires, the review of available questionnaires did not locate any measures that assessed children's cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses to bullying. Therefore, an innovative questionnaire, the Coping Response Bullying Questionnaire (CRBQ), was designed by the researchers to assess children's cognitive, behavioural, and emotional coping responses to four written bullying vignettes: physical, verbal, social, and cyber (see Appendix). Participants were asked to respond to the same vignettes at pre- and post-test by indicating how they would think, feel, and behave if the incident occurred to them on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). In order to determine emotional reaction to the vignettes, participants completed a Likert scale ranging from *a little* (1) to *very* (10) with *medium* (5) as a midpoint, showing how strongly they would feel if the incident occurred to them. The use of vignettes were chosen to allow coping to be explored in the context of bullying, and for participants to explore sensitive issues in a less threatening way.

The cognitive items were written to represent irrational (not logical, not true, not helpful) evaluations of bullying, including 'This is the worst thing in the world', while the behavioural items were written to reflect adaptive and

maladaptive responses to bullying, including 'I would talk to a teacher, friend, or parent'. The emotional items dealt with a range of common negative emotions (e.g., down, angry, and worried), including 'I would feel worried'.

In order to identify any ambiguities or problems in the questions and layout of the questionnaire, a pilot was conducted. The pilot included five children (two males and three females) in Grades 5 and 6 who shared similar characteristics to the target sample. The children were asked to complete the CRBQ in their own time and to provide feedback to the student researcher within 2 weeks of receiving the questionnaire. The results from the pilot revealed all the words were understood, the range of response choices was used, and the respondents correctly followed the instructions.

In this study, the CRBQ displayed good internal consistency at pre- and post-test for the Cognitive scale ( $\alpha = .87$  and  $.88$ ), Behavioural scale ( $\alpha = .79$  and  $.84$ ), and Emotional scale ( $\alpha = .92$  and  $.91$ ). Forty-four items remained from 48 potential coping responses as a result of the reliability analysis, with four items comprising the Cognitive and Behavioural scales, and three items comprising the Emotional scale.

### Resiliency

The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA; Prince-Embury, 2006) is designed to assess core personal qualities of resiliency in children that reflect relative strength and vulnerability unique to each child. It consists of three underlying constructs of personal resiliency: Sense of Mastery, Sense of Relatedness, and Emotional Reactivity. For the purpose of this study's interest in resiliency, only the Sense of Mastery and Emotional Reactivity scales were used to measure elements of resilience that were most likely to moderate this type of intervention. Previously reported Cronbach's alphas were  $\alpha = .88$  for the Sense of Mastery scale and  $\alpha = .95$  for the Emotional Reactivity scale (Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008). In this study, the Sense of Mastery and Emotional Reactivity scales exhibited good internal consistency at pre-test ( $\alpha = .89$  and  $.90$  respectively) and at post-test ( $\alpha = .91$  and  $.91$  respectively).

### Knowledge of program

The Knowledge of Bullying: The Power to Cope Questionnaire (KBPCQ) is an 11-item assessment comprised of nine multiple-choice questions and two short answer questions. It was designed by the researchers to assess children's knowledge of bullying and the coping skills taught in the program. The questionnaire contains items such as 'What is self-talk?' and 'How do you feel about your ability to cope with bullying?', which allowed the student researcher to obtain qualitative data from the children in the experimental group. In a similar manner to the CRBQ, a pilot was conducted with five children (two males and three females) in Grades 5 and 6 who

evaluated the survey in terms of ability to understand and answer the questions. Feedback revealed the items were clearly written and comprehensible.

### Intervention program

The Bullying: The Power to Cope program is designed to teach children cognitive-behavioural skills to be able to manage their emotions and behaviours when dealing with bullying. The coping skills taught in the program include: positive self-talk, assertiveness, seeking social or professional help, body language communication, self-acceptance, and high frustration tolerance. The coping skills are taught through REBT principles, including identifying, challenging and replacing self-defeating thoughts and beliefs with healthier thoughts that promote emotional wellbeing, goal achievement, and problem solving. According to the program's manual, the program is most suitable for children aged from 10 to 17 years. The program can be taught to classroom-size groups of children or individual children who are being victimised by bullying.

The program is organised in four parts that cover the following topics: Part 1. Bullying and Its Impact; Part 2. Thinking Makes It So; Part 3. Things to Say and Do; and Part 4. Coping in Action. As the content of Part 2 is longer, the current study delivered it in two class periods. Accordingly, the program is to be presented in five separate sessions of approximately 50 minutes. A four-part animated DVD that portrays the lives of three students confronted with the realities of bullying accompanies the program's leader manual. A detailed lesson plan presents the sequence and content of activities for each session.

### Procedure

At pre-test (week 1) all participants completed the CRBQ, Sense of Mastery, and Emotional Reactivity questionnaires during one 50-minute class session. During weeks 2 to 6, the program was taught to the children in the experimental group at each school in one 50-minute class session per week, with the teacher present in the classroom. Each session consisted of introductory comments, a segment from the DVD being shown, discussion of the DVD by children, and a number of activities that reinforced the content of the DVD.

In the last teaching session of the program the children in the experimental group were given the KBPCQ to complete. At post-test (week 7) all participants completed the CRBQ, Sense of Mastery, and Emotional Reactivity questionnaires during one 50-minute class session. The children in the control group did not receive the program during the study, thereby serving as a comparison group. Participants in this group continued class as per their regular timetable. However, in order to avoid disadvantaging the comparison group, each school was given the opportunity to implement the program after the completion of the project.

## Results

### Comparison of the Experimental and Control Groups at Pre-Test

Prior to analyses, data cleaning was conducted separately within each time point and according to protocols provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). A one-way between groups MANOVA was performed to investigate pre-test differences in coping responses to bullying vignettes. The total sample size was 139. The independent variable was condition (experimental and control groups). The dependent variable was the CRBQ. The results showed a non-significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the cognitive coping response,  $F(1, 135) = 0.05$ ,  $p = .83$ , partial eta squared = .00 (small), behavioural coping response,  $F(1, 135) = 0.39$ ,  $p = .53$ , partial eta squared = .00 (small), and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 135) = 1.25$ ,  $p = .27$ , partial eta squared = .01 (small). This indicates the experimental and control groups did not differ on reported coping responses at pre-test.

### Improvements in Coping Responses to Bullying Vignettes Between the Experimental and Control Groups

A repeated measures between-groups MANOVA was performed to investigate the differences in coping responses to bullying vignettes between the experimental and control groups. The total sample size reduced to 135 with the deletion of multivariate outliers. Descriptive statistics for each variable of interest at pre- and post-test were calculated (see Table 1). The results showed a significant interaction between time and condition,  $F(3, 131) = 7.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Wilks' lambda = .85; partial eta squared = .16 (large). This indicates that there were differences between the experimental and control group on one or more dependent variables from pre- to post-test. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the interaction of time by condition was significant for the cognitive coping response,  $F(1, 133) = 14.12$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .10 (large) and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 133) = 8.22$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .06 (moderate). An inspection of the mean scores indicated the experimental group showed significant improvement in cognitive and emotional coping responses relative to the control group (see Table 1). Figures 1a and 1b illustrate at pre-test that the experimental and control groups reported similar scores for cognitive and emotional coping. However, at post-test the experimental group reported significantly lower scores for cognitive and emotional coping.

### Gender Differences in Coping Responses to Bullying Vignettes for the Experimental Group

A repeated measures between-groups MANOVA was performed to investigate the differences in coping responses

**TABLE 1**

Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals of the Experimental and Control Groups on the CRBQ

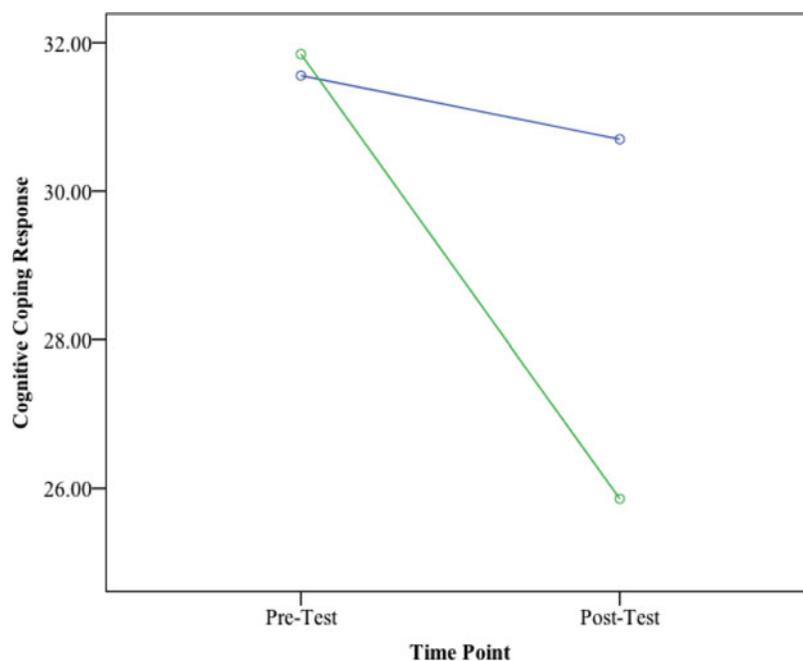
Coping Response	Time period	Experimental					
		group (n = 78)			Control (n = 57)		
		M	(SD)	95% CI	M	(SD)	95% CI
Cognitive	Pre-test	31.85	(8.74)	30.02, 33.67	31.51	(8.11)	29.42, 33.69
	Post-test	25.86	(6.75)	24.22, 27.50	30.67	(8.09)	28.79, 32.61
Behavioural	Pre-test	26.65	(6.42)	25.24, 28.07	25.91	(6.20)	24.24, 27.55
	Post-test	26.21	(6.61)	24.73, 27.69	24.60	(6.91)	22.85, 26.31
Emotional	Pre-test	69.92	(24.70)	64.80, 75.05	74.49	(23.54)	68.63, 80.62
	Post-test	59.74	(20.12)	55.18, 64.30	75.40	(22.46)	70.24, 80.90

to bullying vignettes between the males and females in the experimental group. The total sample size of the experimental group was reduced to 78 with the deletion of multivariate outliers. Descriptive statistics for each variable of interest at pre- and post-test were calculated (see Table 2). The results showed a significant interaction between time and gender,  $F(3, 74) = 3.58, p = .02$ ; Wilks' lambda = .87; partial eta squared = .13 (moderate). This indicates that there were differences between males and females on one or more dependent variables from pre- to post-test. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the interaction of time by gender were statistically significant for the cognitive coping response,  $F(1, 76) = 7.15, p = .01$ , partial eta squared = .09 (moderate) and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 76) = 9.51, p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .11 (moderate). An inspection of the mean scores revealed females in the experimental group showed greater improvement in cog-

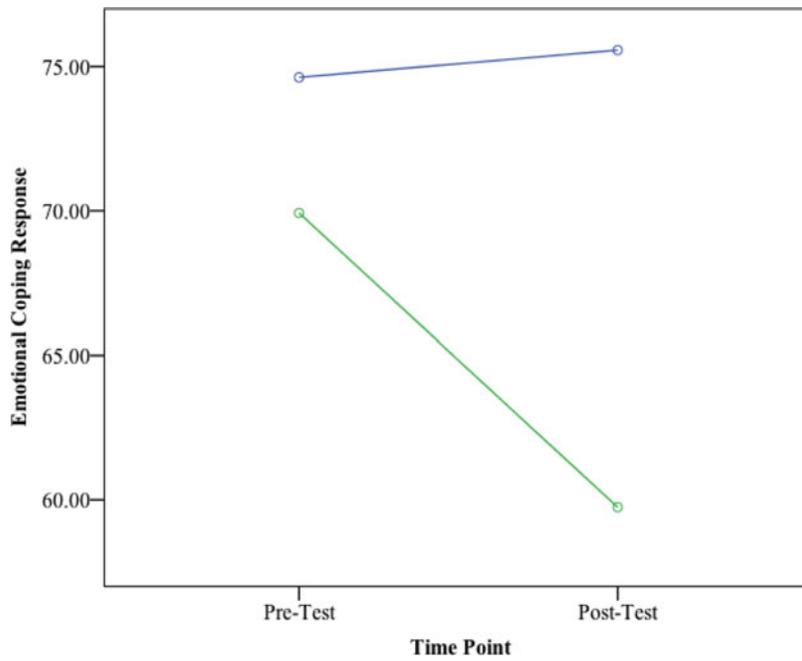
nitive and emotional coping responses relative to males in the experimental group (see Table 2). Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the cognitive and emotional coping responses of females at pre-test were more negative and emotionally intense relative to males. Moreover, at post-test, females and males reported similar cognitive and emotional coping responses.

#### Resiliency Differences in the Response to the Bullying Program for the Experimental Group

A repeated measures between-groups MANOVA was also conducted to investigate the effect of children's entering levels of intrinsic resiliency on coping responses to bullying vignettes. The independent variables were sense of mastery and emotional reactivity levels (high, medium, and low) at pre-test. The dependent variables were measures of coping responses (cognitive, behavioural, and

**FIGURE 1a**

Cognitive coping response between the experimental group (green) and control group (blue) at pre- and post-test.

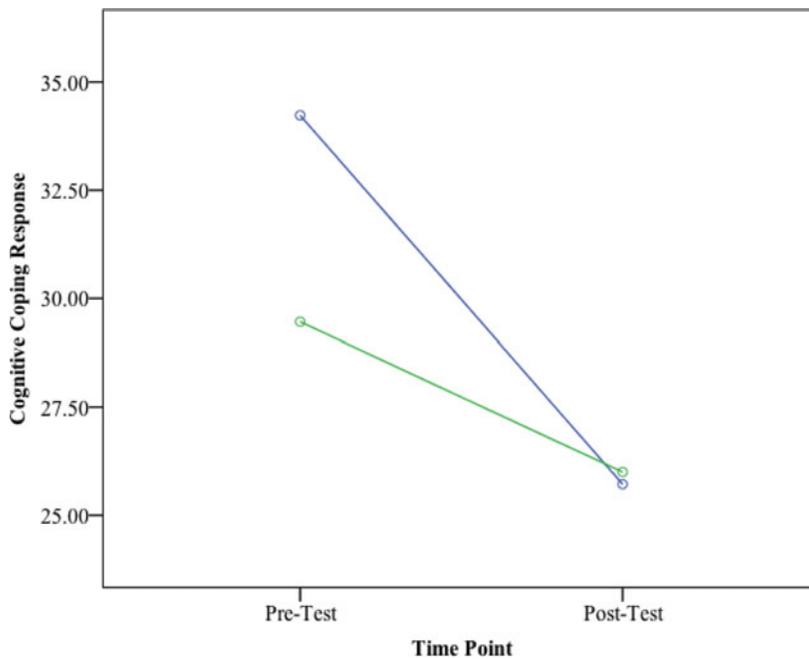


**FIGURE 1b**

Emotional coping response between the experimental group (green) and control group (blue) at pre- and post-test.

emotional) to bullying vignettes at pre- and post-test. The total sample size in the experimental group was reduced to 78 with the deletion of multivariate outliers. The results showed a non-significant interaction between time and sense of mastery levels,  $F(6, 146) = 0.49, p = .81$ ; Wilks' lambda = .96; partial eta squared = .02

(small), and a non-significant interaction between time and emotional reactivity levels,  $F(6, 146) = 1.56, p = .16$ ; Wilks' lambda = .88; partial eta squared = .06 (moderate). This indicates entering levels of intrinsic resiliency did not moderate the effects of the intervention program on children's coping responses.



**FIGURE 2a**

Cognitive coping responses between the males (green) and females (blue) in the experimental group at pre- and post-test.

**TABLE 2**

Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals of Males and Females in the Experimental Group on the CRBQ

Coping response	Time period	Experimental group					
		Males ( <i>n</i> = 39)			Females ( <i>n</i> = 39)		
		<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	95% CI
Cognitive	Pre-test	29.46	(7.74)	26.76, 32.16	34.23	(9.12)	31.53, 36.93
	Post-test	26.00	(7.71)	23.83, 28.17	25.72	(5.74)	23.55, 27.89
Behavioural	Pre-test	27.18	(6.85)	25.13, 29.23	26.13	(5.99)	24.08, 28.18
	Post-test	28.03	(7.09)	25.99, 30.07	24.38	(5.62)	22.35, 26.42
Emotional	Pre-test	61.08	(22.33)	53.68, 68.47	78.77	(24.01)	71.38, 86.16
	Post-test	59.13	(20.93)	52.67, 65.59	60.36	(19.54)	53.90, 66.82

### Children's Comments in Relation to the Bullying Program

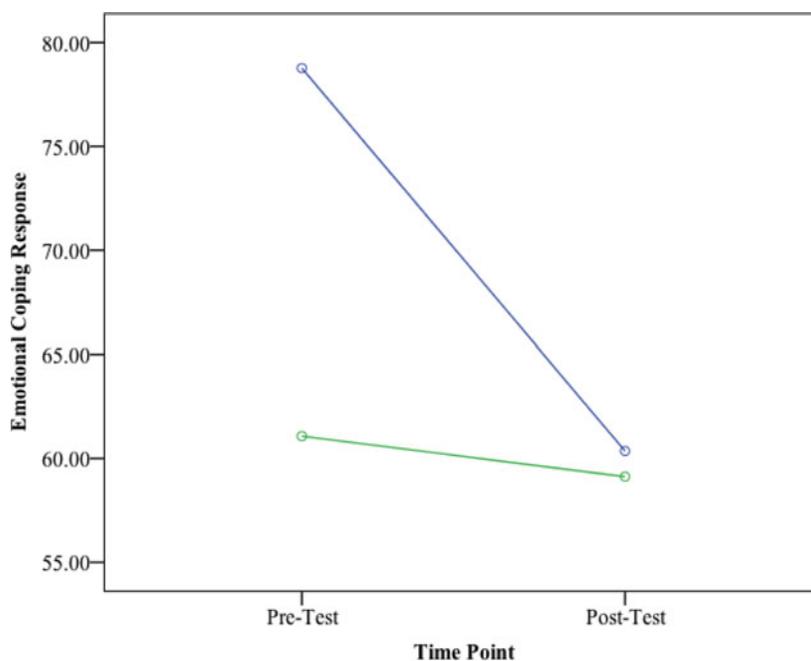
Sixty-four children out of 78 obtained scores greater than 7 on the KBPCQ, suggesting 82% of children learned from the program. The comments (presented as verbatim) displayed in Tables 3 and 4 are data taken from the KBPCQ. Table 3 displays comments taken from the children's responses to question 10 on the KBPCQ, 'How do you feel about your ability to cope with bullying?', while Table 4 displays comments taken from the children's responses to question 11 on the KBPCQ, 'What did you enjoy most about the program?'

Qualitatively, it appears the children in the experimental group experienced positive effects to the Bullying: The Power to Cope program. The majority of children reported they had learned attitudes and coping skills to employ if and when faced with bullying (see Table 3).

### Discussion

This study represents a preliminary evaluation of the Bullying: The Power to Cope program targeting the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional coping responses of children in Grades 5 and 6. In comparison with children in the control group, children in the experimental group showed significant improvement in cognitive and emotional coping responses to bullying vignettes; however, there was no significant improvement in behavioural coping responses.

It is well documented in the literature that bullying is associated with significant psychological, emotional, and academic problems (Cleary, 2000; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Farrow & Fox, 2011). The pre-to post-test improvements in cognitive coping responses for children in the experimental group suggest the Bullying: The Power to Cope program is efficacious as an

**FIGURE 2b**

Emotional coping response between the males (green) and females (blue) in the experimental group at pre- and post-test.

**TABLE 3**  
Ability to Cope with Bullying at Post-Test

Child Comment	Gender
I feel good and I think I can cope with any kind of bullying.	Male
Now I know more ways that I can use when I am in a bullying situation and I know more about using self-talk to calm myself when hurt.	Female
Now I feel confident and have learned it's not badder than war.	Male
I feel good because now I know how to cope with bullying.	Female
My ability to cope has been stronger because now I know some strategies to cope.	Male
I feel confident because I can use self-talk, stay cool, calm and collected, and use positive body language.	Female
I feel like my ability to cope with bullying has now advanced because I participated in the bullying program.	Female
I feel that I can cope with bullying if I use self-talk and other solutions that we learnt during our lessons.	Female
I feel fine.	Male
From this I now feel calm when it happens and to stay positive.	Male

intervention for teaching children to identify and restructure negative (irrational) thoughts into positive (rational) thoughts that promote psychological and emotional well-being. According to REBT, it is largely a child's thinking about bullying that leads to emotional and behavioural upset (Ellis & Bernard, 2006). Teaching children the ideas and skills espoused in the practice of REBT helps them to recognise the self-defeating effects of irrational beliefs and the beneficial outcomes of rational beliefs on emotions and behaviours, which presumably resulted in improvements in cognitive and emotional coping. The post-test assessment results of coping responses to bullying vignettes provides data on how children's responses to real life situations of bullying changed as a result of the intervention.

Within the limits of the current study, the findings support the application of REBT and REE as a school-based intervention program for bullying. In further support of these findings, Ellis and Bernard (2006) and Morris (1993) have proven REBT to be an effective and efficient treatment for many child and adolescent psychological and emotional problems (e.g., anxiety and ADHD).

There were differences between male and female coping responses to bullying vignettes from pre- to post-test. Females showed very significant changes (lessening) of their cognitive and emotional coping responses to the bullying vignettes at post-test. Their mean scores, which differed significantly from males at pre-test, were the same as the male responses at post-test (see Table 3). This finding is in accord with the results obtained by Koeogl et al. (2008) and Pahl and Barrett (2010), who also found males and females respond differently to the same program; and that males and females employ different coping responses and experience various emotions in relation to bullying (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000; Naylor et al., 2001; Spence et al., 2009). Based on these results at post-test, females compared to males showed a decrease in irrational evaluations and negative emotions to bullying vignettes.

Furthermore, an unexpected finding of this study was that females scored significantly higher on the cognitive and emotional scales of the CRBQ at pre-test, indicating greater levels of irrational evaluations and emotionality of the bullying vignettes. Females possessed poorer cognitive and emotional coping responses relative to males, which

**TABLE 4**  
Enjoyable Aspects of the Program at Post-Test

Child comment	Gender
I enjoyed watching the bullying DVD.	Male
I liked doing the activities that were given. They were fun and attractive. It also made me feel good about myself.	Female
I enjoyed watching the DVD and learning new things like self-talk, you can cope with bullies, and when you get bullied it's not how you behave, it's how you think.	Female
I enjoyed highlighting our strengths because it really made me think about who I really am as a person, and who others are as my friends.	Female
I enjoyed the role-plays and the finding your talents and other talents.	Male
It told me how I can stand up for myself so I can feel like a worthwhile person.	Female
I enjoyed most of all the envelope activity 'bit bad, bad, very bad, the worst thing in the world'.	Female
Watching the videos and to know how to cope with bullying.	Male
I enjoyed how they taught us about how to cope with bullying.	Male
The DVD ( <i>The Power to Cope</i> ) and the role plays at the end.	Male

suggests females are more vulnerable to bullying and its adverse effects. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Frydenberg and Lewis (2000) and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004), who reported females experience intense emotional arousal and worry more than males, and admit less ability to cope with adversity. This finding contributes to a growing literature on variations in male and female coping responses to bullying. Gender differences in response to school-based intervention programs offer a way for further exploration regarding the impact of bullying for the psychological and emotional outcomes of the children involved.

The findings also revealed entering levels of intrinsic resiliency (sense of mastery and emotional reactivity) did not impact the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* program as reflected in children's coping responses to bullying vignettes. A possible explanation for this finding is that the children, prior to participation in the program, possessed low average to high average sense of mastery and emotional reactivity, therefore perceiving themselves as having sufficient personal resources and relative strengths with which to deal with bullying. This means it was not possible to determine whether resilience does in fact moderate responses to bullying.

The findings from the analyses of resulting data imply that coping responses to bullying may reflect resiliency profiles; that is, children who possess intrinsic resiliency strengths (i.e., self-efficacious or capacity to maintain normal functioning when upset) are more effectively able to cope with adverse situations such as bullying (Hamill, 2007).

### Implications

The results of this study confirm and extend previous research demonstrating evidence of the efficacy of cognitive-behavioural school-based intervention programs (e.g., Cross et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2005). The *Bullying: The Power to Cope* program allows school staff to work in a coordinated fashion to address school bullying. This is achieved through strengthening the rational beliefs and self-management skills that help children make the very most of their innate potential by minimising unhealthy emotions and irrational beliefs, and maximising their effort and wellbeing (Ellis & Bernard, 2006).

The results support the acceptability and feasibility of implementing low-cost programs that equip children with the skills necessary for effectively coping with bullying, while utilising systems and structures that are already in place in schools. Furthermore, this current study demonstrates differences in the profile of female and male coping responses, especially emotional, which can be useful in coping skill intervention programs for bullying. It seems sensible to suggest a profile-based approach to understanding coping responses in relation to bullying,

which should involve developing programs that take into account female and male differences in emotional reactions, specifically how strongly the child feels towards bullying.

An additional key implication to consider when intervening in the education of children is the gender of the children for whom the program is being developed or implemented. As an example, the current study's findings indicated females possess greater levels of irrational evaluations and emotionality to bullying vignettes; therefore, focusing on improving female students' ability to control or regulate negative emotional responses is paramount.

### Limitations and Future Research

Given the preliminary nature of the promising findings, further evaluation of the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* program is important to validate the effectiveness of this school-based intervention program. Effort in this line of research will increasingly move toward the pursuit of improving children's ability to cope with bullying. Future studies could make effort to recruit children in Grades 3 and 4, and Years 7 and 8 in order to further investigate gender differences in relation to coping responses to bullying. It would also be important to include a sample of children who are in fact victims of bullying, with the aim of broadening the applicability of the program. This will essentially empower schools with the tools and skills necessary to efficiently prevent bullying-related problems.

Research is also needed to explore which aspects of the program were responsible for improvement — that is, attitude and/or skill — and whether females are in fact more cognitively and emotionally irrational/reactive in thinking relative to boys. Of note, two of the items that characterise self-acceptance on the CRBQ, 'I am a real loser' and 'I accept myself no matter what', showed statistically significant pre- to post-test change, indicating the intervention in the package designed to teach self-acceptance was effective.

Child self-report questionnaires were employed in this study to measure coping responses to bullying vignettes and personal qualities of resiliency. The use of children's self-report for all measures is subject to issues of respondent bias and common method variance. While self-report is often used in studies evaluating school-based intervention programs for bullying (e.g., Cross et al., 2011), future studies could benefit from employing additional measures, such as parent or teacher reports and behavioural observations to provide a comprehensive assessment on program efficacy; for example, changes in schoolyard or classroom climate, and to examine group level effectiveness. However, this is not always cost effective and can be difficult to employ in medium- to large-scale research studies.

Furthermore, children were not truly randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, and

the groups comprised of unequal sample size. It was impractical and impossible for the participating schools to complete random allocation of students to obtain equal sample size in groups, due to the coordination of the school timetable and the odd number of student class grades across the three schools. Inspections of the mean scores suggest changes in cognitive and emotional coping responses to bullying vignettes are a true reflection of participation in the Bullying: The Power to Cope program. Nevertheless, studies such as this could be improved by true randomisation and equal number of sample size in groups.

The current study's findings are also limited to two measurement occasions over a 7-week period and cannot necessarily be generalised to longer periods. Children were limited in the amount of time to practise the skills taught in the Bullying: The Power to Cope program. Long-term follow-up of children would allow for a better assessment of program efficacy and skill sustainability (Spence et al., 2009).

### Conclusion

Bullying among school children is an eminent problem associated with negative implications for the psychological and emotional wellbeing of the children involved (Hensley, 2013). The findings from this study, although preliminary, indicate Bullying: The Power to Cope is an efficacious school-based intervention program for improvement in cognitive and emotional coping responses, with females reporting greater improvements relative to males.

The particularly interesting finding was the cognitive and emotional coping responses of females to bullying vignettes (pre-test) that were significantly more negative and emotionally intense than males. This suggests the coping responses utilised to deal with bullying can be explained by a child's gender. The study's findings build upon current understandings of REBT and REE and coping skills training as important and valuable school-based interventions for children. Continual efforts in this field of research will increasingly proceed to establishing and evaluating bullying intervention programs that are applicable and empower schools with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively prevent bullying and its harmful affects.

### References

- Barrett, P.M. (2007). *Fun Friends. The teaching and training manual for group leaders*. Brisbane, Australia: Fun Friends Publishing.
- Bernard, M.E. (2012). *Bullying: The power to cope*. Melbourne, Australia: The Bernard Group.
- Bernard, M.E., Ellis, A., & Terjesen, M. (2006). Rational-emotive approaches to childhood disorders: History, theory, practice and research. In S. Ellis & M.E. Bernard (Eds.), *Rational emotive behavioural approaches to childhood disorders: Theory, practice, and research*. New York: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Brownlee, K., Rawana, J., Franks, J., Harper, J., Bajwa, J., O'Brien, E., & Clarkson, A. (2013). A systematic review of strengths and resilience outcome literature relevant to children and adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 30*, 435–459. doi:10.1007/s10560-013-0301-9
- Cleary, S.D. (2000). Adolescent victimisation and associated suicidal and violent behaviours. *Adolescence, 35*, 671–682.
- Craig, W., Harel-Fisch, Y., Fogel-Grinvald, H., Dostaler, S., Hetland, J., Simons-Morton, B., . . . the HBSC Bullying Writing Group. (2009). A cross-national profile of bullying and victimisation among adolescents in 40 countries. *International Journal of Public Health, 54*, 216–224. doi:10.1007/s00038-009-5413-9
- Cross, D., Hall, M., Erceg, E., Pintabona, Y., Hamilton, G., & Roberts, C. (2003). The Friendly Schools project: An empirically grounded school bullying prevention program. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 13*, 36–46.
- Cross, D., Monks, H.E., Hall, M.R., Shaw, T.M., Pintabona, Y., Erceg, E.L., . . . Lester, L. (2011). Three-year results of the Friendly Schools whole-of-school intervention on children's bullying behaviour. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*, 1–25. doi:10.1080/01411920903420024
- Cross, D., Shaw, T., Hearn, L., Epstein, M., Monks, H., Lester, L., & Thomas, L. (2009). Australian covert bullying prevalence study (ACBPS). Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. Retrieved from [www.docs.education.gov.au](http://www.docs.education.gov.au)
- Earlscourt Child and Family Centre. (2001). *SNAP children's group manual*. Toronto: Author.
- Eisenberg, M., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Perry, C. (2003). Peer harassment, school connectedness, and academic achievement. *Journal of School Health, 73*, 311–316.
- Ellis, A. (1994). *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart and Citadel Press.
- Ellis, A., & Bernard, M.E. (2006). *Rational emotive behavioural approaches to childhood disorders: Theory, practice, and research*. New York: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Farrow, C.V., & Fox, C.L. (2011). Gender differences in the relationships between bullying at school and unhealthy eating and shape-related attitudes and behaviours. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*, 409–420. doi:10.1348/000709910X525804
- Frey, K.S., Hirschstein, J.L., Snell, J.L., Van Schoiack Edstrom, L., MacKenzie, E.P., & Broderick, C.J. (2005). Reducing playground bullying and supporting beliefs: An experimental trial of the Steps to Respect program. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 479–491. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.41.3.479
- Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (2000). Teaching coping to adolescents: When and to whom? *American Educational Research, 37*, 727–745.
- Hamill, S.K. (2007). Resilience and self-efficacy: The importance of efficacy beliefs and coping mechanisms in resilient adolescents. *Colgate University Journal of the Sciences, 35*, 115–146.
- Hensley, V. (2013). Childhood Bullying: A review and implications for health care professionals. *Nursing Clinics of North America, 48*, 203–213.
- Hajzler, D.J., & Bernard, M.E. (1991). A review of rational-emotive education outcome studies. *School Psychology Quarterly, 6*, 27–49.
- Hunter, S.C., Boyle, J.M.E., & Warden, D. (2004). Help seeking amongst child and adolescent victims of peer-aggression and

- bullying: The influence of school-stage, gender, victimisation, appraisal, and emotion. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *74*, 375–390.
- Kids Help Line. (2009). Bullying, harassment, and physical violence. Retrieved from [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)
- Knaus, W.J. (1974). *Rational emotive education: A manual for elementary school teachers*. New York: Institute for Rational Living.
- Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2004). Peer victimisation: The role of emotions in adaptive and maladaptive coping. *Social Development*, *13*, 329–349.
- Koegl, C.J., Farrington, D.P., Augimeri, L.K., & Day, D.M. (2008). Evaluation of a targeted cognitive-behavioural program for children with conduct problems — The SNAP Under 12 Outreach Project: Service intensity, age, and gender effects on short- and long-term outcomes. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *13*, 419–434. doi:10.1177/1359104508090606
- Machmutow, K., Perren, S., Sticca, F., & Alsaker, F.D. (2012). Peer victimisation and depressive symptoms: Can specific coping strategies buffer the negative impact of cyber victimisation? *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *17*, 403–420. doi:10.1080/13632752.2012.704310
- Morris, G.B. (1993). A rational-emotive treatment program with conduct disorder and attention-deficit hyperactive disorder adolescents. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy*, *11*, 123–134. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2009.01.004
- Naylor, P., Cowie, H., & Rey, R. (2001). Coping strategies of secondary school children in response to being bullied. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry Review*, *6*, 114–120.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Pahl, K.M., & Barrett, P.M. (2010). Preventing anxiety and promoting social and emotional strength in preschool children: A universal evaluation of the Fun Friends program. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, *3*, 14–25.
- Prince-Embury, S. (2006). *Resiliency scales for children and adolescents: Profiles of personal strengths*. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessments.
- Prince-Embury, S., & Courville, T. (2008). Measurement invariance of the resiliency scales for children and adolescents with respect to sex and age cohorts. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *23*, 26–40.
- Putter, S. (2007). Peer victimisation: The role of self-efficacy in children's coping strategies. *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, *5*, 82–86.
- Rigby, K. (1999, June). *What harm does bullying do?* Paper presented at the Children and Crime: Victims and Offenders Conference, Brisbane, Australia.
- Rigby, K. (2007). *Bullying in schools: And what to do about it*. Melbourne, Australia: Author.
- Rigby, K. (2013). Bullying in schools and its relation to parenting and family life. *Family Matters*, *92*, 61–67.
- Society for Research in Child Development. (2008). Children who bully also have problems with other relationships. *Science Daily*. Retrieved from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080325083300.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080325083300.htm)
- Spence, S.H., Young, A., Toon, C., & Bond, S. (2009). Longitudinal examination of the associations between emotional dysregulation, coping responses to peer provocation, and victimisation in children. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *61*, 145–155. doi:10.1080/00049530802259076
- Tabachnick, G.G., & Fidell, L.S. (2007). *Experimental designs using ANOVA*. Belmont, CA: Duxbury.

## Appendix

### Coping Response Bullying Questionnaire (CRBQ) Vignettes

#### Vignette 1:

A student who is in your class who is bigger and stronger keeps hitting and kicking you when nobody is looking and tells you that if you tell anyone he will just hurt you more.

#### Vignette 2:

Your friends laugh at you and keep calling you 'stupid' and 'retard' because you are experiencing some difficulty in reading and writing.

#### Vignette 3:

During lunch period you see some classmates sitting at a table. You walk up to them and ask if you can sit with them. They totally ignore you, with one of them replying: 'There is no way you are sitting with us.'

#### Vignette 4:

A classmate is spreading hurtful rumours about you by posting messages on Facebook. Many children at school now won't play with you or even speak to you. Even your friends are starting to think the rumours may be true.