

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

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**Abstract**

This study evaluated the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional coping responses utilised by children in grades five and six in response to bullying. Self-report data was collected at pre- and post-test of children's coping responses to four written bullying vignettes. At pre-test, children's intrinsic resiliency was also measured. The sample consisted of 139 participants ( $n = 80$  in the experimental group,  $n = 59$  in the control group). 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 in coping responses to bullying as a consequence of the intervention than males. 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, and schools.

## BULLYING: THE POWER TO COPE

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 10 of children who are bullied at school can experience short or long term problems 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 four to year nine children report being bullied every few weeks or more during a term of school (Cross et al., 2009). Figures provided by Kids Help Line (2009) suggest children aged 10 to 14 years encounter the most severe issues of bullying.

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. Research indicates bullying negatively effects children's ability to self-regulate their emotions (e.g., Spence, Young, Toon & Bond, 2009). Furthermore, research suggests strengthening coping responses through educational interventions is associated with children's greater ability to deal with other children who bully (e.g., Cross, et. al. 2011; Pahl & Barrett, 2010). Gender differences have been found in the types of bullying behaviour demonstrated (e.g., Naylor,

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et. al, 2001) and in the types of coping responses children employ (e.g., Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000).

An understanding of 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 better than others to adversity such as bullying (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 traits, such as their general sense of mastery and emotional reactivity. Within these two factors of personal resiliency there are a number of underlying constructs, such as self-efficacy and emotionality, which have emerged as two important constructs in bullying.

Given the harmful effects of bullying, 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 in a proportion of studies, males and females often respond differently to the same programs. Pahl and Barrett (2010) examined the efficacy 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 in 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.

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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 improvements 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 the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* (Bernard, 2012) program that is based on Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1994) and Rational Emotive Education (REE; Knaus, 1974). This program teaches rational beliefs and cognitive-behavioural skills, and is delivered to groups of children in classrooms. The basic idea of REBT is that an individual's emotions and behaviours are strongly influenced by how they think about events rather than the events themselves (Gonzalez et al., 2004). According to REBT, at the core of emotional and behavioural problems are rigid and absolute beliefs (e.g., *musts* and *shoulds*) and their derivatives (e.g., *awfulising*). REBT has been applied to children and adolescents exhibiting a wide range of emotional and behavioural problems, such as anxiety and depression (Ellis & Bernard, 2006) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Morris, 1993).

The aim of this study was to evaluate the *Bullying: The Power to Cope* program. Interest was also 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 the Power* program in terms of coping responses (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional) to

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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?

### Method

#### Participants

The sample consisted of children in grade five ( $n = 53$ ) and grade six ( $n = 86$ ), 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 10 to 14 years ( $M = 10.79$ ,  $SD = .65$ ).

#### Materials

##### **Coping response.**

Despite the existence of several coping questionnaires, no questionnaire was found that explicitly assessed children's coping response 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. Participants were asked to respond to the vignettes by indicating how they would think, feel, and behave if the incident occurred to them on a four-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.

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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 grade five and six 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 two 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  $.91$ ). However, the degree to which each item correlated with the total score for one of the Behavioural scale items was low ( $< .2$ ). This may indicate the item is not discriminating well and therefore this item was omitted from the survey (Crocker & Algina, 1986). 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.

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For the purpose of this study's interest in resiliency, only the Sense of Mastery and Emotional Reactivity scales were used.

### **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?' that 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 grade five and six 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. According to the program's manual, the program is most suitable for children aged 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 contents of part two are longer, it can be delivered 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



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students confronted with the realities of bullying accompanies the programs leader manual.

A detailed lesson plan presents the sequence and content of activities for each session.

### **Procedure**

At pre-test (week one) all participants completed the CRBQ, Sense of Mastery, and Emotional Reactivity questionnaires during one 50-minute class session. During weeks two to six, the program was taught to the children to the children in the experimental group at each school in one 50-minute class session. 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 seven) 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. 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,  $F(1, 135) = 0.05, p = .83, \text{partial eta squared} = .00$ , behavioural

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coping response,  $F(1, 135) = 0.39, p = .53$ , partial eta squared = .00, and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 135) = 1.25, p = .27$ , partial eta squared = .01. This indicates the experimental and control groups did not differ on reported coping responses at pre-test.

### **Improvements in Coping Responses to Bullying Vignettes**

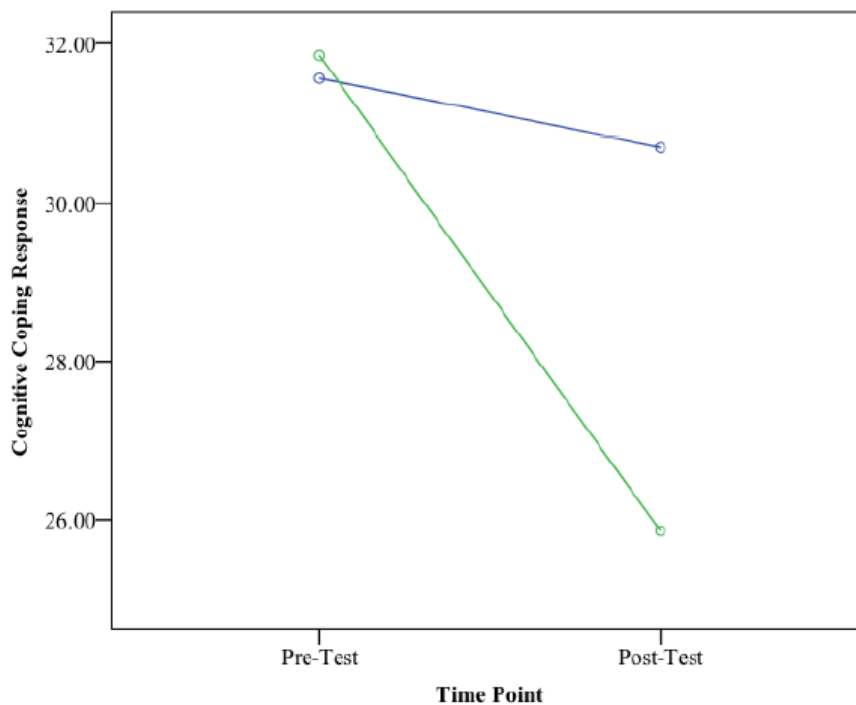
A repeated measures between-groups MANOVA was performed to investigate the differences in coping responses to bullying vignettes between the experimental and control groups. The total sample size reduced to 135 with the deletion of multivariate outliers. Descriptive statistics for each variable of interest 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. 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 and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 133) = 8.22, p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .06. 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 1(a) and 1(b) illustrate the differences in the cognitive and emotional coping responses between the experimental and control groups at pre- and post-test.

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Table 1

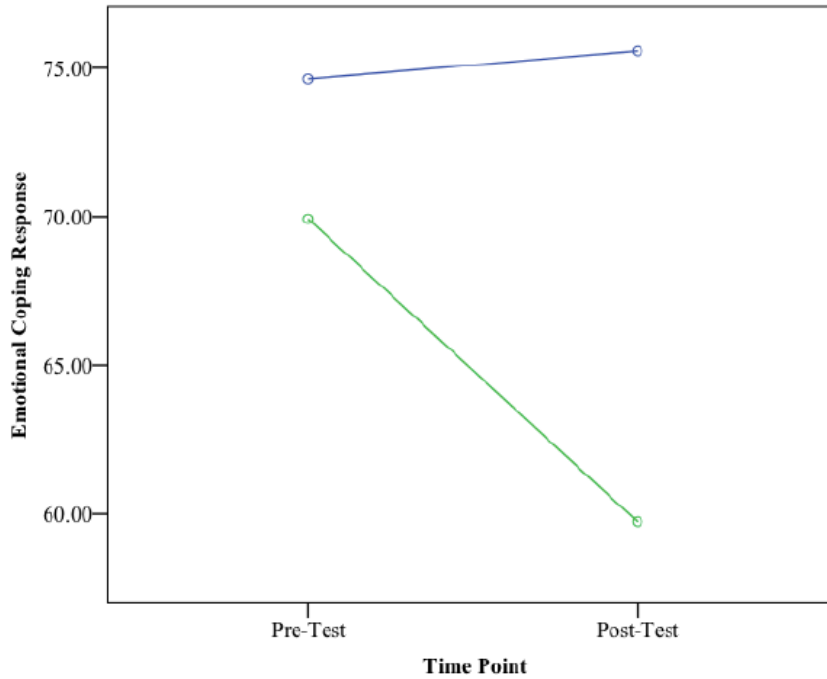
*Means (Ms), Standard Deviations (SDs), and Confidence Intervals (CIs) of the Experimental and Control Groups on the CRBQ*

Coping Response	Time Period	Group					
		Experimental ( <i>n</i> = 78)			Control ( <i>n</i> = 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



*Figure 1(a). Cognitive coping response between the experimental group (green) and control group (blue) at pre- and post-test.*

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*Figure 1(b).* Emotional coping response between the experimental group (green) and control group (blue) at pre- and post-test.

### **Gender Differences in Coping Responses to Bullying Vignettes**

A repeated measures between-groups MANOVA was performed to investigate the differences in coping responses 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. 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 and emotional coping response,  $F(1, 76) = 9.51, p < .01$ , partial eta squared = .11. An inspection of the mean scores revealed females in the experimental group showed greater improvement in cognitive and emotional coping responses relative to

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

Table 2

*Means (Ms), Standard Deviations (SDs), and Confidence Intervals (CIs) 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)		
		M	SD	95% CI	M	SD	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

### **Resiliency Differences in the Response to the Bullying Program**

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 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;

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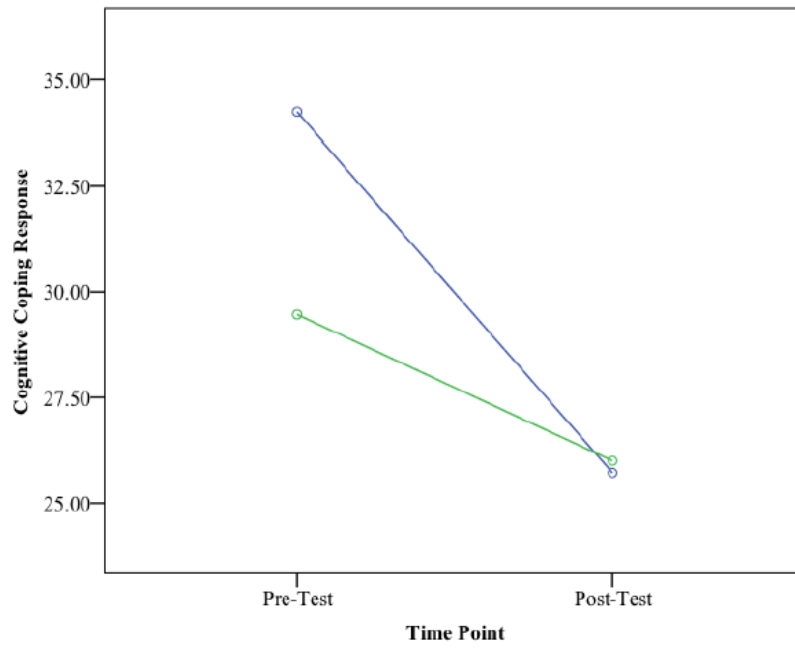


Figure 2(a). Cognitive coping responses between the males (green) and females (blue) in the experimental group at pre- and post-test.

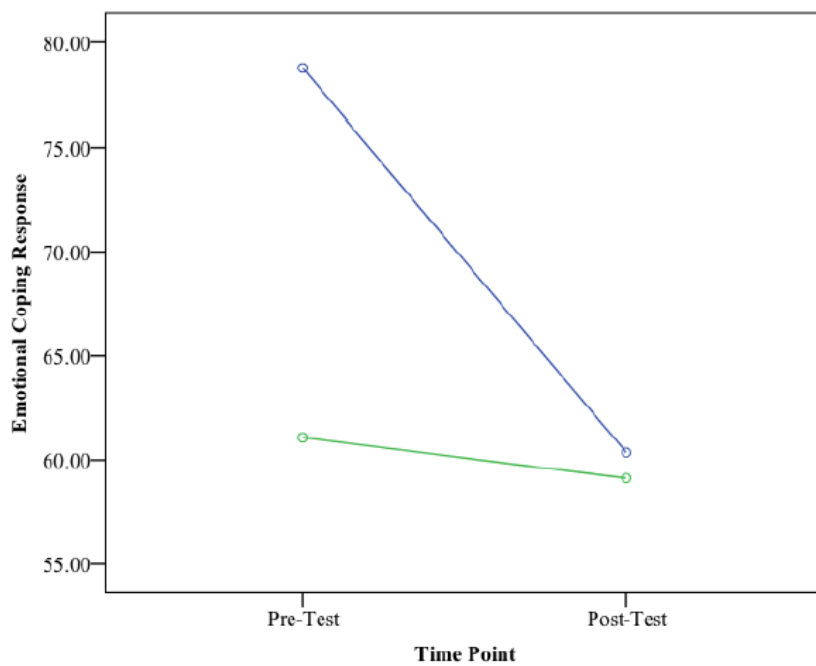


Figure 2(b). Emotional coping response between the males (green) and females (blue) in the experimental group at pre- and post-test.

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partial eta squared = .02, 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.

This indicates entering levels of intrinsic resiliency did not moderate the effects of the intervention program on children's coping responses.

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

Sixty-four children out of 78 obtained scores greater than seven on the KBPCQ, suggesting 82% of children learned from the program. The comments (presented as verbatim) displayed in Tables 3 and 4 is 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 grade five and six. 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 no significant improvement in behavioural coping responses.

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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 bader the 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

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 its how you think.	Female
I enjoyed highlighting our strengths because it really made me think about who I	Female



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really am as a person, and who others are as my friends.

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 (The Power to cope) and the role plays at the end.	Male

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It is well documented in the literature that bullying is associated with significant psychological, emotional, and academic problems (Cleary, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 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 intervention for teaching children to identify and restructure negative (irrational) thoughts into positive (rational) thoughts that promote psychological and emotional wellbeing. According to REBT, it is largely a child’s thinking about bullying that leads to emotional and behavioural upset (Ellis & Bernard, 2006). Teaching children an emotional vocabulary and coping skills (e.g., self-acceptance, body language communication, and seeking social or professional support) helps them to reformulate their irrational beliefs and negative thinking patterns, and realise they have behavioural and emotional options if and when bullied. This consequently results in improved coping ability, as changing individuals thoughts about bullying can result in a very powerful change to their emotions and behaviours.

The current study’s findings also support the application of REBT and REE as a school-based intervention program for bullying. Utilising REBT as a framework for teaching children to recognise the self-defeating effects of irrational beliefs and the beneficial outcomes of rational beliefs on emotions and behaviours presumably resulted in

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improvements in cognitive and emotional coping. 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 Koegl et al. (2008) and Pahl and Barrett (2010) who also found males and females respond differently to the same program. Furthermore, 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).

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. 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. 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. Females possessed poorer cognitive and emotional coping responses relative to males; therefore it is not unreasonable to speculate that females are more vulnerable to bullying and its adverse effects. This finding contributes to a growing literature on variations in male and female coping responses to bullying.

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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 average to high average sense of mastery and average to low average emotional reactivity; therefore, perceiving themselves as having sufficient personal resources and relative strengths with which to deal with bullying. The findings from the analyses of resulting data implies coping responses to bullying may reflect resiliency profiles, that is, children who possess intrinsic resiliency strengths (i.e., capacity to maintain normal functioning when upset or self-efficacious) 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, whilst utilising systems and structures that are already in place in schools. Furthermore, this current study demonstrates differences in the profile of 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

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relation to bullying, which should involve developing programs that take into account profiles of strengths and weaknesses in the emotional domains of coping.

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. It is not known to what extent the findings would generalise to children in different grade levels. Future studies should make effort to recruit children in grade three and four, and year seven and eight. 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

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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 parent or teacher reports and behavioural observations in order to provide a unique and comprehensive perspective to confirm program efficacy. 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 seven-week period and cannot necessarily be generalised to longer periods. Children were limited in the amount of time to practice 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:*

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*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.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

None.

### **Ethical Standards**

The authors assert all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008. The authors also assert all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional guides on the care and use of laboratory animals.

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