

# What makes a bully? Examining the role of aggressive physical behaviors between SES and being a bully

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## Introduction

- Bullying is a prevalent issue among school aged children in America
- Bullying**  
“A subcategory of interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power”<sup>3</sup>
- The main difference between bullying and other forms of aggression is the bully’s abuse of power<sup>3</sup>
- One in every four students reports being bullied. Although this does not seem like a very large number, 64% of bullying incidents are unreported, showing that bullying is a pervasive behavioral problem<sup>6</sup>
- 81% of students report performing some act of bullying in the past 30 days, and 7.7% report frequent acts of bullying<sup>1</sup>

### Socioeconomic Status

- Refers to the sociological and economic level an individual is a part of
- Socioeconomic factors are connected with a child’s risk for becoming involved in bullying more so than individual differences<sup>2</sup>
  - Students raised in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be involved in violent acts than students raised in privileged neighborhoods<sup>4</sup>

### Physically Aggressive Behaviors

- Hostile or destructive behaviors or attitudes
- There has been no prior research on aggressive behaviors as a mediator between SES and bullying

## Hypothesis

**Hypothesis:** Physically aggressive behaviors will mediate between SES and self-reported bullying.

## Results

### Correlations between SES, SEX, bullying, and aggressive behaviors

	SES	Sex	Agg Behaviors	Bullying
SES	1	.05	-.13**	-.10*
Sex	.05	1	-.05	.01
Agg Behaviors	-.13**	-.05	1	.15**
Bullying	-.10*	.01	.15**	1

## Method

Our data comes from the New Hampshire Youth Study (NHYS), a longitudinal study focusing on determining reasons for adolescents’ rule-violating behavior. At time 1 (T1), participants were given the survey. They took the survey again one year later (T2) and then again another three years later (T3). After each measurement, participants were compensated \$10 each.

8 middle schools and 5 high schools

- The data used was collected at three time points:
  - Fall of 2007 (T1)
  - Fall of 2008 (T2)
  - Fall of 2011(T3)

### Participants

N = 438 57.8% female, 79.4% Caucasian  
Average age 13.73 (SD = 1.60)  
SES Mean = 7.16 (SD = 2.51)

### Measures

- Physically Aggressive Behaviors
  - Variety frequency based measure
    - In the past 6 months how many times have you hit or seriously threatened to hit someone?*
    - Mean = 0.20 (SD = .22) ,  $\alpha = 0.76$
- Bullying
  - Asked to rate from 0-6+ how many times they performed a specific act
    - During the past 30 days, how many times did you call a kid from your school a bad name?*
    - Mean = 0.12 (SD = 0.23)  $\alpha = 0.70$

## Discussion

### Support for Our Hypothesis

- SES was negatively related to aggressive behaviors
- Aggressive behaviors mediated the relation between SES and bullying
- SES was negatively related to aggressive behaviors
- Aggressive behaviors were positively related to bullying

### Implications

- Our research supports prior findings that SES has an influence on bullying, such as the study conducted by Bowes, et al.<sup>2</sup>
- Bullying is more prevalent in lower SES communities
- When dealing with a bully at school, take into account their background

### Limitations

- The NHYS is a self reported measure, so participants may not have been truthful
- This study was conducted in New Hampshire which is not a state with much diversity
- The bullying questions were asking about behavior in the past 30 days, but the aggression questions were asking about the past 6 months

### Future Directions

- Use suspension records, or have parents, teachers, and peers report on behaviors as well the students themselves
- Research the same relationship among children at a younger age
- Look at other variables that may explain the relationship between aggressive behaviors and bullying
- Consider testing schools in different environments (city vs. suburb)
- Consider using a scale that has consistent measures of time
- Provide alternative outlets for aggression to all students, such as after-school sports
- Look at prevention programs and examine if they are making a difference in behavioral problems
- Focus prevention and intervention programs around anger
- Direct intervention programs at reducing bullying, focusing not only on schools but also local communities and families

## References

<sup>1</sup>Bosworth, K., Espelage, D. L., & Simon, T. R. (1999). Factors associated with bullying behavior in middle school students. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 19*(3), 341-362. doi:10.1177/0272431699019003003

<sup>2</sup>Bowes, L., Arseneault, L., Maughan, B., Taylor, A., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2009). School, neighborhood, and family factors are associated with children’s bullying involvement: A nationally representative longitudinal study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 48*(5), 545-553. doi:10.1097/CHI.0b013e31819cb017

<sup>3</sup>Hymel, S., & Swearer, S. M. (2015). Four Decades of Research on Bullying. *American Psychologist, 70*(4), 293-299. Retrieved April 7, 2016, from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-a0038928.pdf>

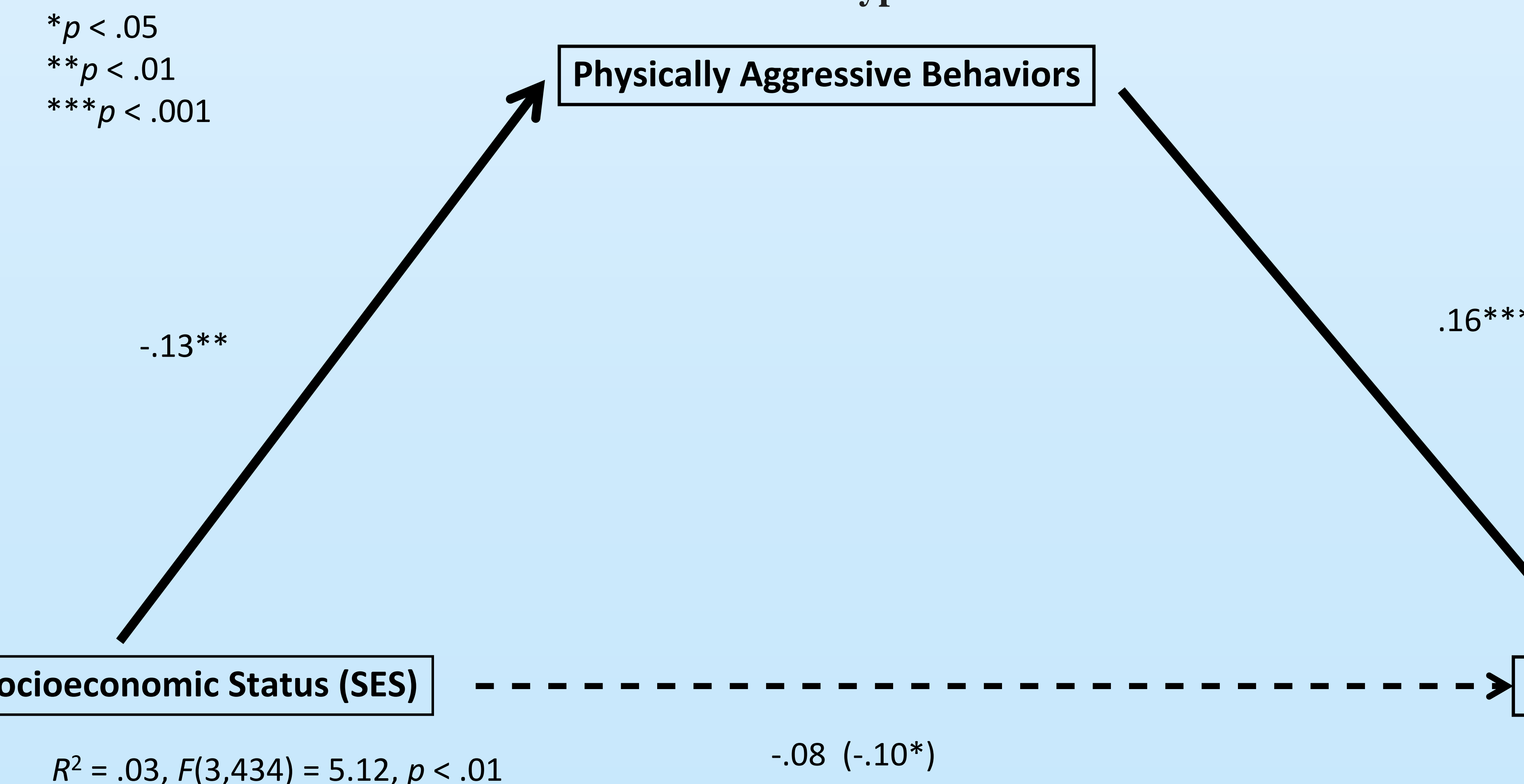
<sup>4</sup>Kim, S., Orpinas, P., Kamphaus, R., & Kelder, S. H. (2011). A multiple risk factors model of the development of aggression among early adolescents from urban disadvantaged neighborhoods. *School Psychology Quarterly, 26*(3), 215-230. doi:10.1037/a0024116

<sup>5</sup>Nail, P. R., Simon, J. B., Bihm, E. M., & Beasley, W. H. (2016). Defensive egotism and bullying: Gender differences yield qualified support for the compensation model of aggression. *Journal of School Violence, 15*(1), 22-47. doi:10.1080/15388220.2014.938270

<sup>6</sup>Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: Results From the 2007 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey. (2015). PsycEXTRA Dataset. Retrieved from Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: Results From the 2013 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

## Results

### Standardized beta estimates for hypothesized mediation model



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