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Bullying as a Predictor of Early Pregnancy

Dana Fadel

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**Abstract**

According to the World Health Organization, bullying has been identified as a current critical public health problem (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Bullying is defined by consistent, repeated maltreatment through physical or emotional aggression that is often experienced at school or online, (Young-Jones, Fursa, Byrket, and Sly, 2015). Studies on bullying and its effects are plentiful, ranging from psychological to social-emotional damages; however, there is a gap in the research on its effect on teen pregnancy. This mixed methods study examined the effects and consequences of bullying as a risk factor in teenage pregnancy. Through 17 surveys and three interviews of high school parents, this study revealed that 82% of students experienced bullying in school, 40% said they left school due to bullying, including other factors, and nearly 50% surveyed said that it was very important to stay in school. This study found that most high school parents had experienced bullying. The researcher recommends that schools need to become or stay vigilant against bullying by monitoring locations that bullying occurs, connecting individually with students who are at greater risk, and instituting a school-wide no-tolerance policy against bullying.

### **Introduction to the Problem**

According to the World Health Organization, bullying has been identified as a current critical public health problem (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Bullying is defined as consistent, repeated maltreatment through physical or emotional aggression that is often experienced at school or online (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). Studies on bullying and its effects are plentiful, ranging from psychological to social-emotional damages. There are only a few studies conducted that connect bullying to teen pregnancy; none of which are in Maine. The goal of this research is to examine the long-term effects of bullying and its potential effects on increasing the risk of teenage pregnancy.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Health Outcomes**

The consequences of bullying are becoming more well known as researchers have sought to explore the potential risk factors. As online communities were initially and quickly forming, researchers Juvonen and Gross (2008) looked closely at the legitimacy of the internet as a potentially risky space for youth to be targets of bullying. Their conclusions resulted in students self-describing as more anxious due to cyberbullying. Researcher Kristsotakis (2017) examined the gender-specific health effects of bullying. They found both male and female middle and high school victims of bullying were more likely to engage in risky behavior in their college years, such as an increase in alcohol use and a decrease in condom use. In these studies, researchers identified two different, yet critical, long term health impacts of bullying.

#### **Academic Outcomes**

Not only does bullying affect victims' health, but also their success in academia. Young-Jones, Fursa, Byrket, and Sly (2015) studied the long-term effects of bullying on high school and college age students and the relationship between bullying and successful academics. Their findings included a decrease in victimization of bullying as students move through school. Ultimately, the researchers' theory of past victimization leading to future bullying was confirmed and their past experience has affected their academics, self determination, as well as basic psychological wellness. Similarly, in Kiriakidis' (2009) study, he concluded that bullying was a strong predictive factor of "several psychosocial difficulties" and that there are long term effects of bullying that last into adulthood. Itof (2017), in a study conducted about low self esteem, concluded those with low self esteem is a predictor of victimization, and the constant experience of bullying decreased their esteem even more.

### Pregnancy

While bullying has not been directly linked to high school pregnancy, there are numerous studies about the risk factors to teen or high school age pregnancy. This particular study by East, Khoo, and Reyes (2006) named the protective factors rather than the risk factors that can aid in preventing adolescent pregnancy. They examined the factors of early pregnancy by looking at three potential protective factors: involved parents of students, positive school-relationship, and preexisting attitudes towards early pregnancy. The findings included that more involved parenting resulted in preventing early pregnancies; teens who are less interested in having children are less likely to get pregnant. The relationship to a positive school experience did not seem to have an effect on girls' risk of early pregnancy. Researchers conclude that intervention programs focus on protective parenting skills and conversations with

practitioners about plans or goals for childbearing is highly recommended to prevent early pregnancy.

### Bullying and Pregnancy

A relevant study examined the childhood victimization of bullying is associated with motherhood in adolescence, looking at family risk factors, psychiatric state, and as it relates to victim vs perpetrator. Lehti, et.al. (2010) after issuing questionnaires for six years, suggested that there is higher risk of bullies becoming teenage mothers. A recent American study related to the topic of early pregnancy and bullying, examined the disparity among sexual minorities (lesbian, bisexual) compared with their heterosexual peers of becoming pregnant before the age of 20. Charleton (2018) examined risk factors that included “childhood maltreatment, bullying victimization and perpetration, and gender conformity,” concluding that sexual minorities were more likely to experience a teen pregnancy than heterosexuals.

### Other predictors

Other risk factors have been studied to combat trending rates of high school pregnancies. Two studies, both examining rural populations, discovered predictors of early pregnancies included some predictable and some unpredictable results. Robinson, et.al. (1998), reported from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey that polled junior high students, found that male and female students who smoke, drink, have lower school efficacy, and who don't communicate with their families about sex or relationships are early predictors of teen pregnancy. Bickel (1994) unexpectedly found that teenage birth rate positively correlated to a large school district size, thus less of an opportunity to be a part of a community.

### Summary

A review of the literature revealed that there are many health and academic long-term outcomes of bullying. This literature review has shown that other predictors of early teen pregnancy are often unassuming, making room to explore possibilities to analyze different connections.

### **Purpose**

Bullying is defined by consistent, repeated maltreatment through physical or emotional aggression that is often experienced at school or online, (Young-Jones, Fursa, Byrket, and Sly, 2015). Studies on bullying and its effects is plentiful, ranging from psychological to social-emotional damages. However, there is a gap in the research connecting it to teen pregnancy. The purpose of this research is to examine the potential long-term effects of bullying as it relates to an increased risk of teenage pregnancy in Maine.

### **Research questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1. Does bullying increase the risk of early pregnancy? 2. Was bullying a primary reason that students were leaving school? 3. Was pregnancy an exit strategy for leaving school because they did not like attending due to bullying?

### **Research Methods**

I used Explanatory Sequential Design to collect a quantitative survey (see Appendix A) to then inform collecting my qualitative information (Creswell & Guetterman, 553). The intent was to expand on the quantitative data I collected over the survey with more formal qualitative interviews. I used Google Forms to gather the quantitative portion of my research, setting up the interviews by phone, text, or Facebook messenger, using the same questions from the survey. I

reflected their responses to them from the survey, then asked them to expound upon those responses.

Data was collected over a period of six weeks, from January to February 2020, first by issuing the survey (see Appendix A), then following up with three interviews. The quantitative surveys were automatically graphed, calculated, and recorded in Google Sheets. Some of the responses included a 'check all that apply' option, Likert number scale, agreement scale, never-always scale, among others. The qualitative, open-ended interview questions were hand coded and analyzed for themes.

In the survey, the sections were deliberate in their order, as I wanted the participants to connect their experience of bullying to their pregnancy experience. In the first section of the survey, "Bullying in School," questions regarding their experience included how, where, and when they were bullied, why they thought they were bullied, and when they left school. In the section about "Pregnancy and School," questions included their feelings on their pregnancy, whether it was planned or unplanned, when they found out, and why they left school. In this section, I asked more pointedly how they felt about school and how important it was to them to stay in school. I thought of these questions with the help of fellow teacher colleagues.

The participants of this research were required to sign an informed consent form that described what they had to do, how long the interview will take, how the data will be kept confidential, and how the data will be analyzed and used. The survey also had a consent agreement question before the survey began. In order to proceed for a follow up interview, students must sign a second consent form agreeing to participate. While I knew students reporting in the survey and in the interview, I did not collect identifying information. Interviews



were recorded and transcribed. I was able to connect to three students who consented to an interview: via phone call, video chat, and an in-person interview. Parts of one interview were lost due to internet issues; however, I was able to recover the majority of the recording. The recording device (my phone) was maintained by me, and transcriptions stored on my password protected computer were in my possession only. Interview questions remained the same questions as in the survey, in the same order. The transcriptions were printed and were kept at my desk at home and destroyed after use. Initials were used throughout the process, and no other identifiers were known.

The mixed methods approach to my research sought to collect quantitative data from as many current parenting high schoolers in our program that would take the survey. This would allow me to see a broad picture of the pattern I originally perceived, the effects bullying might have had on their school attendance, and the role it may have played in their early pregnancy. Seventeen willing students in the program, after signing the consent forms required, took the fourteen question survey. The survey was broken up into two sections: Bullying and School, and Pregnancy and School. In both sections, I included the question, Why did you leave school? in hopes of getting the participants to think about it in different contexts. The final question on the survey prompted participants for an interview: “By choosing ‘agree,’ you consent for a follow up interview (either over phone, Facebook video chat, or in person, per your choice), to elaborate on your answers in the survey. Thank you for your time!”

The qualitative data collection of this research sought to capture and give voice to the individual bullying experiences that students faced at a traditional high school. These stories, while unique to each story teller, are undoubtedly familiar occurrences in a number of student’s

everyday lives. While I, too, connected with the student's experiences of bullying, did not let my bias or past circumstances get in the way of their sharing. I allowed each teller to share what they felt moved to without interruption, interjection, or time limit. Bullying can be traumatic and personal; we each move through our lives trying to understand its meaning and value to us, in retrospect. Sometimes, bullying scars us in ways that we don't consciously notice, admit to, or understand. One of the objectives of this research is to navigate those subconscious scars and help heal them through sharing.

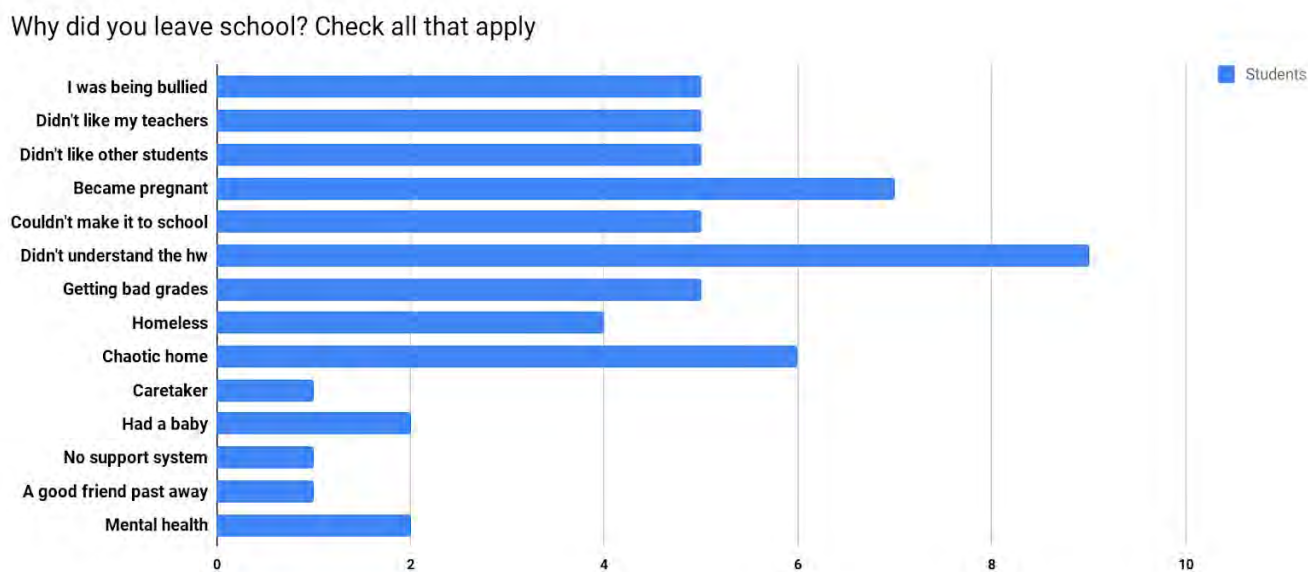
## Data

### Quantitative Results

To get at the heart of how bullying affected students attending school, I asked twice within the survey about their motivations for leaving school. Graph 1 shows the respondents' answers the first time they were prompted with the question.

Graph 1

*Reasons why students left school and the number of students polled*



While over 50% of students surveyed chose “I didn’t like or understand the homework” option, 30% of participants chose “I was being bullied” as a reason why they left school. Forty percent, or seven students, chose “I became pregnant,” as one of the main reasons why they left school. Thirty five percent of those surveyed said their home life was too chaotic to attend school. Analyzing the responses individually, two of the five that chose bullying as a factor in leaving school did not choose any other factors, while the three out of five chose a combination of the following factors: “I didn’t like my teachers,” “I didn’t like the other students,” and “I didn’t understand or like the homework.” To those three, the overall school experience tormented them to the point of no return. Only one participant chose both “I was pregnant” and “I was bullied” as factors of leaving school.

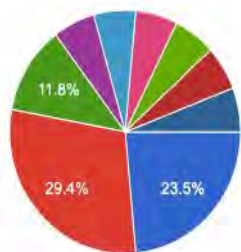
Participants were prompted by the same question a second time in the section, Pregnancy and School. Thirty percent of students reported that their reasons for leaving school were “Due to Bullying Only,” while “Due to the Pregnancy Only,” was only slightly behind at 24%; while 12% choose “Due to pregnancy, bullying, and other factors,” (see Figure 1). By limiting choice in this question, it forced students to make a decision on the best, most relevant motivation to exit school altogether.

Figure 1

*Percentage of Students and the Reasons Why They Left School*

Why did you leave school?

17 responses



- Due to the pregnancy only.
- Due to bullying only.
- Due to the pregnancy and bullying.
- Due to the pregnancy, bullying, and other factors.
- Lack of end of year testing held me back.
- I hated school
- I didn't have anyone to take care of me.
- Become a cluster F\*\*\* to do school and...

1/2 ▼

That said, 36% desired to write in their responses to best reflect their experience, which included answers such as, “Anxiety, home life, not being able to focus, depression,” as well as, “Lack of end of year testing held me back from going to the next grade, twice. I quit and gave up. I also was very depressed from life and my lifestyle that was predetermined by my opioid-using father.” One student succinctly wrote-in, “hated school,” without further explanation.

### Pregnancy as an Exit Strategy

To dig for more clues around the question of whether pregnancy was an exit strategy for leaving school, I compared and analyzed two of the responses from the survey: “When did you find out you were pregnant” and “When did you leave your previous high school?” With the help of the Google Sheets responses summary, I placed them side by side to compare dates of when each participant initially found out their pregnancy results and their leaving school. I did this in order to see whether students left school before, during, or after finding out their pregnancy status. Also, it is notable that when prompted, participants knew the dates of both when they left school (to the day) and when they found out they were pregnant. When comparing dates, 53% of students left school *after* getting their pregnancy results, while 42% left school before getting pregnant.

### Qualitative Findings

The three individual interviews highlighted more concretely their reasons for leaving high school; I was able to directly ask why they left school. Two out of the three participants interviewed did not connect bullying to the cause of their departure. However, as I have discovered throughout this research project, the connection is not always a linear one. Take

Interviewee 1: With an insecure housing situation and chaotic home, Interviewee 1 was falling behind in school that made her feel like she wasn't able to continue:

“Mainly leaving school had to do with the school itself. I didn't know the homework, I was failing, falling behind, but my parents were planning on moving to a different school before my senior year was over, because our house was being foreclosed on, so that was a reason to not go back. Also, not having a social life and friends. I basically had my b-f who wanted all the attention on him, so I didn't focus on school but couldn't anyway since I didn't know what was going on. School became a chore, almost.”

As mentioned previously in this report, interviewees were posed the same questions from the survey in the same order; I asked her a second time with the question about leaving school. In the survey, she first reported leaving school due to lack of friendships, a chaotic homelife, being behind in academics. This aligned with her interview. The participant reported a second time (on the survey), that she left school, “Due to bullying only.” Her reply to her choice had an explanation:

“I don't know why I said that, I must have read it completely wrong. Again, leaving senior year right in the middle of another school wasn't ideal and that's what my parents wanted me to do...I didn't have enough credits to graduate. I was naively in love with this free-spirited guy and I was bullied at school and failing at school. It just seemed like a good idea all around [to leave]. Plus with the bullying I had no friends, so I was gonna move to a new school with no friends...I just felt, ‘Why even continue school? I'm just gonna leave!’”

For this student, the motivation to leave school was not entirely provoked by the bullying, but by the negative school culture, toxic atmosphere related to bullying, and falling behind. Also, the love and attention she was receiving from her boyfriend, as they were planning their family, was enough to entice her to stay out of the school system entirely. For her, bullying was one piece of the multifaceted puzzle. I didn't follow up with the interviewee about the timing of her planned pregnancy, but she did discuss the unlikelihood of her being able to stay in school while pregnant, primarily due to the fear of being slut-shamed.

For Interviewee 3, bullying had a profound effect on her school attendance. She would often purposefully miss the bus, sleep in late, or throw tantrums in resistance. According to her IEP, her attendance was the biggest barrier to her succeeding in school. In both the survey and in the interview (which was less than five minutes in length), she concurred that the reason she left school was because she "was bullied everyday. I didn't want to go there anymore, I was sick of it. That and doing stuff around the house, and being bad at school, I just gave up on it." The exhaustion of trying to survive at school was too much for her. Throughout her middle school experience, she was bullied. In the spring of her 8th grade year, she stopped showing up altogether; the summer before her freshman year, she got pregnant. With this interviewee, the domino effect of bullying is a clearer trajectory than other experiences.

Overall, the students interviewed said that their school experience was challenging, to say the least. Between the chaos of their home lives and the abuse they faced at school, there were very few places of refuge. One student reported:

"When I was in foster care, [school] was something fun, like an escape, then it became more of a nightmare. I was being bullied for other reasons, but having a

rough home life and being bullied at school and then when people started finding out about my home life, they started bullying me about my home life. It was a crap show all around. Plus I was bullied at home as well. I ended up going to the psychiatric ward for three weeks, due to the bullying at school and at home. It was bullying of all sorts, bullying at home and everywhere.”

Another interview shared a very similar situation, saying that she enjoyed getting out of the house (which was chaotic) but school was just as challenging: “I was bullied everyday. I didn’t want to go there anymore, I was sick of it. I enjoyed getting away from stuff at home, but I was happy to leave school. It sucked. I barely even talked to my teachers. Like I only had one friend in school.” The toxic school climate was too much for students to handle amongst the distress they endured when returning home. To these students, leaving school was the best alternative to the ‘nightmare’ they experienced in school.

The interviews revealed a dynamic to bullying that needs to be noted here. The absence of teachers present in these student’s bullying experience contributed to the severity of the problem. All three students shared that they were most likely bullied when teachers were not around to witness, safeguard, or stop the bullying. One student reported, “The bullying was consistent everywhere, on the bus, but more honestly, in the hallways. In unsupervised areas, if that makes any sense. Like, where school administrators weren’t anywhere.” Another student reported a similar scenario: “So in seventh grade [bullying] was absolutely atrocious in my homeroom, as soon as the teacher would walk out to monitor the halls at the end of the day. I was in an afterschool program called [omit] and after school, on the bus ride home, I used to sit in the back. One day it was so bad one day, they got a huge pack of erasers and threw them at

me. It stopped on the bus after that and I ended up screaming at them to stop it. That ended it on the bus.” In the absence of authority, bullying prevailed.

## **Discussion**

### **Research Limitations**

The purpose of this research is to examine the potential long-term effects of bullying as it relates to an increased risk of teenage pregnancy in Maine. This study is a particularly nuanced one, searching for connections that are complex and multidimensional. Surveys, while helpful for hard data collection in a short amount of time, can be challenging for analysis purposes. Participants in this survey may not have understood the questions being asked, read it incorrectly, or were inherently bothered by the process of clicking on number scales. While a quick survey to take, students had to take up time in their meetings with their teachers to do it. Some of my colleagues did not ask their students to take the survey, either due to discomfort with the task or didn't have the specific clientele (mothers) to issue to.

In the survey, I did not include a definition of “bullying” which could have been helpful to those with a broad or unspecified understanding of the word. Bullying is a somewhat subjective experience that could range in definition; without a universal definition included on the survey left students to interpret it on their own. A couple of my students who had never experienced bullying, after submitting the survey, would hold a discussion with me about what bullying was to them. In retrospect, examining varying definitions of bullying would have been an interesting and dynamic approach to the research.

A mixed methods approach to research allows for the collected quantitative data of numbers and graphs to have a voice with the supplemental qualitative stories and sharings. It was



helpful to get a clearer, more focused picture of the participant's experience. The challenge with interviewing for this study, however, was the inconsistent follow through with keeping the interview appointment. Students and their children would fall sick, disregard messages, or forget the appointment; all factors that are typically a challenge for us teachers to meet with students anyway. I had a relationship with each of the three students that were interviewed: one was my student, while the other two were students that I have engaged with in prior school events. I may have had an influence over the answers based on our previous student-teacher dynamic; but, this may have also held true if I didn't know the students well. Two students I interviewed were engaged with the interview, while the third did not give a lot of specifics and kept the conversation brief. And, while I would have liked to have interviewed every student that was surveyed, the amount of coding would have been overwhelming.

The personal, intimate level of questioning is a limitation of the research. There were moments throughout this research collection process that some students, filling out the survey, would interject with private anecdotes or confessions. It is critical that participants feel that their answers won't receive judgement or repercussion for honest answers to surface. One student admitted that she had never told anyone that her pregnancy was planned (and continued to mark it "planned" on the survey). I learned from doing this research that the previously held narratives of our lives can get in the way of truth in data collecting.

### **Interpretations of Findings**

#### **The Long-Term Effects of Bullying: A Dislike of School**

As previously stated throughout this report, there are case studies done on the long-term effects of bullying that range from academic to the psychological. The question I am examining

here is whether bullying is predictive of early pregnancy. There are multiple risk factors that have been associated with early pregnancy such as socio-economic status or intergenerational cycle of teen pregnancy, but also a “dislike for school,” according to some research (Lehti, 2010). In the survey issued within a Likert scale, only 12% of students surveyed said they were not happy about leaving school, while over 80% were neutral-to-very excited to leave. Forty percent said they would not have stayed in their high school even though they may not have had another schooling option, thus leaving school behind altogether, despite 50% reporting in the survey that it was important to stay in school. The reasons for leaving school are clearly more complex than the choices given in the survey. By distilling the motivations into a few options forced participants to think about what really compelled them, ultimately, to leave school.

Even without this research, most can agree that there are very few positive outcomes when someone is bullied. I have not been suggesting here that there is a causation of bullying leading to early pregnancy, but rather examining a potential correlation with those who have been targets of bullying being at greater risk of becoming parents in high school. This research began from working with pregnant and parenting teens for four years who had expressed negative experiences in high schools due to prolonged periods of physical, emotional, and psychological maltreatment by peers and/or teachers. My first finding from this research is that it remains unclear if there is a causal link to having been bullied and early pregnancy.

The second finding of this research indicated that most parenting students had experienced bullying in school, but there is no indication that it was the sole reason why they left school. When examining a combination of factors of school and home life challenges, the

students may be more vulnerable to bullying which may contribute to the likelihood of them dropping out.

The third finding of this research did not indicate that getting pregnant was an exit strategy for leaving school. From the survey alone, the data showed that students either dropped out before getting pregnant, or tried to stay in school as long as possible before they couldn't. Their feelings did not indicate a strong liking for school in general, but their motivation to stay in school was strong.

### **Conclusions**

While the link of bullying and early pregnancy are nuanced, it has been made apparent that the need for anti-bullying intervention is critical in order to support student's need to stay in school. Both a toxic school environment and home life add to the complexities of early pregnancy and high drop out rates. Schools need to become or stay vigilant against bullying by monitoring locations that bullying occurs, connecting individually with students who are at greater risk, and instituting a school-wide no-tolerance policy against bullying.

**Appendix A: Google Forms Survey**Bullying in School

Please answer the following questions so we can understand the effects of bullying. Your answers are confidential. Thank you for your time!

1. By checking the box "Agree," you consent to participate in the research project conducted by Dana Fadel, a Passages teacher and a student at the University of Maine. You may be asked to follow up with Dana if you consent by clicking agree on the last question of this survey.  
Check all that apply.
  - ☐ Agree
2. When did you leave your previous school?  
Example: December 15, 2012
3. How often were you bullied at your previous school?  
Mark only one oval.
  - ☐ Never
  - ☐ Weekly
  - ☐ Monthly
  - ☐ Always, every day
  - ☐ Other:
4. Why did you leave school? Check all that apply.  
Check all that apply.
  - ☐ I was being bullied.
  - ☐ I didn't like my teachers.
  - ☐ I didn't like the other students.
  - ☐ I became pregnant.
  - ☐ I couldn't make it to school every day.
  - ☐ I didn't understand or like the homework.
  - ☐ I was getting bad grades.
  - ☐ I was homeless.
  - ☐ I had a chaotic home.
  - ☐ Other:
5. Where were you bullied?  
Mark only one oval.

- I was never bullied.
  - When I was in Elementary school only
  - When I was in Elementary and Middle school only
  - When I was in Elementary, Middle and High school
  - I was bullied other places than school
  - Other:
6. How were you bullied? Check all that apply.  
Check all that apply.
- I wasn't bullied
  - I was teased and called names
  - I was hit or kicked
  - Others wouldn't talk to me or sit by me
  - Others said they would hurt me
  - Others would text or use social media to hurt me
  - Others took my stuff and never returned it
  - Other:
7. How many students bullied you?  
Mark only one oval.
- I have never been bullied
  - One student
  - Two or more

### Pregnancy and School

Please answer the following questions about school and your pregnancy.

1. When did you find out you were pregnant?
2. Was your pregnancy planned or unplanned?
  - a. (Checkmark: Planned or unplanned)
3. How did you feel when you found out that you were pregnant?
  - a. (Scale: Excited to Not Excited)
4. Why did you leave school?
  - a. (Checkmark: Due to Pregnancy Only; Due to Bullying Only; Due to Pregnancy and Bullying; Due to Pregnancy, Bullying, and Other reasons).
5. How did you feel about leaving school?
  - a. (Scale: Happy to Unhappy)

6. Would you have stayed in school while being pregnant if you didn't have any other options?
  - a. (Checkmark: Yes, No, Maybe, Other)
7. How important was staying in school when you found out when you were pregnant?
  - a. (Scale: Unimportant to Important).

#### Additional consent for follow up interview

By choosing to agree, you consent for a follow up interview (either over the phone, Facebook video chat, or in person per your choice) to elaborate on your answers in the survey. Thank you for your time!

Choose agree or disagree

- Agree
- Disagree

What is your name and the best way to contact you?

### **Appendix B: Three Student Interviews**

#### Interviewee 1

Q: Where were you bullied?

A: The bullying was consistent everywhere, on the bus more honestly, and in the hallways. In unsupervised areas, if that makes any sense. Like, where school administrators weren't anywhere.

Q: Ok. Why did you leave school?

A: I left school not due to bullying but because I was a naive 17 year old girl who thought she was in love with her boyfriend and learned the hard way, (laughs).

Q: In the survey, you responded, and that was clearly not an option, but you checked on I didn't understand or like the homework, I was getting bad grades, I was homeless, I had a chaotic home.

A: Yeah, leaving him created the homelessness. [My school] kinda scrapes kids by, um, and dropping out was already something I wanted to do, but I had to leave the home in order to do that. I didn't understand a lot. Basically, they scraped me by senior year until they had all of these

tests you had to have certain scores on that I didn't pass, you know, because they had scraped me by without actually teaching me.

Q: So when did you leave school?

A: I left fall of senior year.

Q: You did mention that you were already planning on leaving school. Can you say more about that?

A: Mainly leaving school had to do with the school itself, not necessarily bullying, but that played a part in it. Not only did I not know the homework, failing, falling behind, but my parents were planning on moving to a diff school before my senior year was over, because our house was being foreclosed. Also not having a social life and friends, I basically had an abusive boyfriend who wanted all the attention on him, so I didn't focus on school but couldn't anyway since I didn't know what was going on. School became a chore, almost. And when I was in foster care, it was something fun, like an escape, then it became more of a nightmare.

Q: And it was a nightmare, because?

A: I was being bullied for other reasons but having a rough home life and being bullied at school and then when people started finding out about my homelife they started bullying me about my home life it was a crap show all around. My school was really superficial. Unless you were wearing name brand clothes and played sports and had good grades, you were basically garbage to them. Girls would come to school with their hair and makeup done, I would come to school after going to Goodwill. My mom had restrictions on my wardrobe. A rough home life I didn't really care about school. It was rough all around, especially for things that were out of my control like my home life, it kinda sucked.

Q: Where did you get bullied, was it ever online?

A: No, my social media my parents monitored a lot, so it wasn't there as much. And then I would get called names on the bus, kids would pull pranks on the bus. I remember it to this day, I even confronted this kid, we even ended up at this party together...I said to him, 'I remember being in 6th grade and having this crush on you and you asked me out and you said, Ha Ha, just kidding.' And the whole bus laughed. This guy almost started crying, and I was just like, I wanted to call you out on it when I'm an adult with more confidence or more umph. I went through some sexual confusion in high school, I didn't know if I liked women or men, so I got bullied a lot from people about that. People would write things on the walls about that about me. Plus I was bullied at home as well. I ended up going to the psychiatric ward for three weeks, due to the bullying at school and at home. It was bullying of all sorts, bullying at home and everywhere.

Q: On the survey, I asked the question twice actually, in the survey, of why did you leave school, and your response was, due to bullying only. Can you explain that?

A: I don't know why I said that, I must have read it completely wrong. Again, leaving senior year right in the middle of another school wasn't ideal and that's what my parents wanted me to do...I didn't have enough credits to graduate. I was naively in love with this free-spirited guy and I was bullied at school and failing at school. It just seemed like a good idea all around. Plus with the bullying I had no friends, so I was gonna move to a new school with no friends...I just felt, 'Why even continue school? I'm just gonna leave!'

Q: The last question I have for you is, Would you have gone back to school while being pregnant if you didn't have any other options?

A: If I went back to school when pregnant with [my daughter]? Absolutely freakin' not. Absolutely not.

Q: Yes, exactly. You've said this throughout your entire interview here. In the survey, though, you did respond, "Yes" that you would have stayed.

A: Um, now, [laughs] thinking about this and like, talking about it outloud, I don't know. I really don't think. In talking about these questions and talking about these stories out loud now, I am thinking it through. Cause it was really--I don't mean to throw all my business out there--I didn't lose my virginity until I left high school and that ? the boyfriend. I was called things like a whore, and a slut, and a skank. People would make fun of me when I would wear, even a slightly revealing pair of shorts, or if I wore too tight of pants, like, that was what they like to pick people on. At my school, you were cool if you had good grades and you liked your parents and you played sports and da da da. They didn't like you if you were the rebellious, slut type. Which is what they thought I was. Cause honestly, thinking about it harder, I couldn't imagine being pregnant at school, cause if they picked on me with revealing clothing, can you imagine getting pregnant young in high school and then going to school there?

Q: Right.

A: God no. No way. But then it always makes me think, like, I don't know, half my brain is like, no way, but maybe you could be a role model to other students and it might not be as bad.

Q: Well, that is all I have for you. Thank you so much for your time and your honesty, and your stories. I really appreciate it, so much.



Interviewee 2

*Parts of the recording were lost due to internet issues.*

A: Before I got pregnant, I was having a lot of trouble with my mental health anyways. It was about the time my parents found out about all the trauma I endured in my childhood that they had no idea about. We were all coming to terms and everything. Also I was having bad grades. And like, I was watching my sister or going to work and my mother basically said, as soon as I started working, I either pay rent or I watch my sister. So it was always a chaotic home, and also, my brother is on the spectrum. So, he was usually front and center in everything. It's always been chaotic. They let [my boyfriend] move in as soon as I knew him because he was homeless. He moved in, 6 months later I got pregnant, and then my dad found out at 7 months along, but they knew 3 months along, 3 or four months. I thought they were going to kick me out.

Q: And then what happened? Did they kick you out?

A: They were pretty mad at me because I took too long to tell them. They were like, ok, when are you due? It was a month before I was due. They were like, 'we have to plan a baby shower now!' Oh my gosh you are kidding me.

Q: You said you were bullied always, everyday. Can you say more about that?

A: So the bullying stopped at about 9th grade. There was still teasing, but in like, 7th grade, I was heavily bullied. But elementary school, every day, cause I moved around so much I didn't have time to make friends. [Pause] I kinda forgot about all this stuff. It doesn't affect me as badly as it used to.

Q: So you forgot that all happened?

A: I didn't forget, it's always been there. I had this friend [in elementary school] who if i didn't do what he wanted, would beat me up and tease me. I liked this boy and then, he liked me first apparently and he showed his liking to me by pushing me into the wood chips everyday. It was a lot of general teasing. I used to have a unibrow, so I used to get called 'unibrow.'

Q: Ok in middle school, did it get worse, or better?

A: In middle school, I didn't have a lot of friends. There were less people teasing me but the teasing was a lot worse. And I was in a special reading class because I was behind and scored really low on my tests, the test you take in 6th grade that determined where you were going. So in 7th grade [bullying] was absolutely atrocious in my homeroom. As soon as the teacher would walk out to monitor the halls at the end of the day. I was in an afterschool program called --- and after school, on the bus ride home, I used to sit in the back. One day it was so bad one day, they got a huge pack of erasers and threw them at me. It stopped on the bus after that and I ended up screaming at them to stop it. That ended it on the bus.

Q: Did that end it entirely?

A: Just on the bus. So my problem with school has always been with homework. Ever since fifth grade I was in a lower class reading, I was in an english class who needed it. I was the smartest kid there, cause my biggest problem wasn't reading it was homework. So I got picked on for knowing the answers, so I stopped answering for a while. You think it will stop when you're in that situation. But you think it will in that situation.

Q: Thank you. I have a couple more questions. How did you feel about leaving school?

A: Honestly I felt relieved, but I also panicked because I never thought I would graduate. I don't know what I was going to do, I didn't know how I was going to make it without a diploma. My whole family on my mom's side was encouraging me to graduate. It's really hard to get a good paying job without your diploma.

Q: You said you were relieved about leaving school, why did you say 'relieved'?

A: I was relieved because I didn't have to worry about walking there everyday. And in the wintertime, December and January, you don't want to be walking when you're that pregnant. I thought everyone knew I was pregnant, but I wore a huge hoodie, so no one knew why I left school. Nobody could tell.

Q: Would you have stayed in your public high school while being pregnant if you didn't have any other options?

A: I would have stuck it out and gotten my diploma because it wasn't that big of a deal. I could have caught the bus. And it would have taken me a bit longer to graduate because I was missing a bunch of credits, since I was going to night school initially, but I feel like I could have graduated that summer.

Q: Thank you so much, those are all the questions I have for you.

Interviewee 3

Q: How often were you bullied at school?

A: I was bullied everyday. I didn't want to go there anymore, I was sick of it.

Q: Is that why you left school?

A: That and having to do stuff around the house, and being bad at school, I just gave up on it.

Q: When were you bullied? You said in the survey, Middle School Only.

A: Just in Middle School. I left before starting high school.

Q: How many students bullied you? In the survey, you said five.

A: Yeah, five students bullied me. They took turns.

Q: Where did you get bullied?

A: They bullied me outside.

Q: What about the cafeteria?

A: No, I always sat by myself in the cafeteria.

Q: When did you leave school?

A: [Pause] I don't know. I left school and then I got pregnant. [Pause] The spring of 2017.

Q: Oh, right, you were not in school. Okay. Okay. Let's see. So you left school, you said in the survey, due to bullying. [Nods] And how did you feel about leaving school?

A: I enjoyed getting away from stuff at home, but I was happy to leave school. It sucked. I was always the quiet one. I barely even talked to my teacher. Like I only had one friend in school.

Q: Would you have stayed in your public high school while being pregnant if you didn't have any other options?

A: I would not have returned to school if I were not pregnant. My mom wanted to homeschool me anyway, and then I found this school.

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