Bullies, Victims, and Teachers in Japanese Middle Schools

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Since the 1980s, school bullying—*Ijime*—has been a major concern of educational policy in Japan. After mass media attention to student suicides due to *Ijime*, and following several law suits, the government has urgently requested that schools deal with *Ijime*. Two further student suicides in 2005 and 2006 led the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereafter Ministry of Education) to organize several conventions to strategize on ways to reduce *Ijime*. The reports produced from these conventions emphasized a need for greater collaboration between schools and community members (MEXT 2006a; 2007).

In addition to these measures, it is also important to understand the roles that may be played by school resources, including teachers. In Japanese schools, homeroom teachers provide guidance for students' psychological and social development, in addition to academic development.[1] Homeroom teachers spend significant time counseling students, visiting their families, and developing a homeroom community where students feel a sense of belonging. When *Ijime* occurs in a classroom, the homeroom teacher is mainly responsible for resolving the case. However, despite the potential for homeroom teachers to reduce *Ijime*, few researchers have examined the relations between students and their homeroom teachers and the consequences of this relation for *Ijime*. Even less is known about what relationships *Ijime* victims and bullies have with their other subject teachers. The aim of this article is to help fill this gap in our knowledge.[2]

Here we examine three major aspects of student-teacher relationships in Japanese schools: teacher bonding, student guidance, and instructional support. We then analyze the possible association of these relationships with victimization and perpetration of *Ijime* based on a survey of students in seven middle schools within a single school district. We pose two general research questions. First, what relationship do *Ijime* victims and bullies have with school teachers? Second, how is the student-teacher relationship associated with victimization and bullying, controlling for student background characteristics

[1] See LeTendre (1994, 1995, 2000) and Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001).

[2] In previous studies on school bullying, teacher factors were often measured only as parts of school climate or sense of belonging (Bosworth et al. 1999; Espelage et al. 2001; Ando et al. 2005), and when they were measured separately, different dimensions of student-teacher relationships were not measured (Natvig et al. 2001; Roland and Galloway 2002).

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and attitudes toward schooling? The findings of this study will inform Japanese policy makers, educators, and administrators, and could also offer new insight into teachers' roles in other countries.

Background

Ijime is defined by the Ministry of Education as "continuous physical and psychological aggression inflicted upon someone weaker, which causes serious pain on the victim. It includes aggression that occurs both inside and outside of school" (MEXT 2006c). This definition is similar to the definition used widely in Europe.[3] The Ministry of Education collects annual data on the number of *Ijime* cases reported by principals in elementary (grades 1–6), middle (grades 7–9), and high schools (grades 10–12). According to this national statistics, the number of *Ijime* cases has declined from 60,096 cases in 1995 to 20,143 cases in 2005 (MEXT 2006b). These numbers correspond to the decrease in the percentage of schools with at least one case of *Ijime* from 40.6 percent to 19.4 percent (MEXT 2006b). In 2005, 11.3 percent of elementary schools, 34.6 percent of middle schools, and 30.0 percent of high schools reported *Ijime* cases. However, official reports of *Ijime* do not accurately measure the rates of *Ijime* because many *Ijime* cases are not reported to school administrators. The decrease in these statistics may simply show the underreporting of *Ijime* cases in more recent years with an increased pressure on schools to reduce *Ijime* cases. Therefore, it is important to look at student reports of *Ijime* cases to accurately understand the rates of *Ijime*.

We examined the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), in which a nationally representative sample of 4,833 Japanese eighth graders reported their victimization from school bullying. Based on the question, "In school, did any of these things happen *during the last month?*" 28.8 percent responded that they were "made fun of or called names," 19.5 percent were "hit or hurt by other student(s) (e.g., shoving, hitting, kicking)," and 6.1 percent were "left out of activities by other students" (percentages computed based on a secondary analysis of the TIMSS data). In addition, a national student survey of *Ijime* was also conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1997 (Morita et al. 1999a). For students in middle schools (grades 7–9), 10.2 percent reported that they experienced teasing and verbal threats, while 6.5 percent reported social exclusion or being ignored (Morita et al. 1999a). Physical violence was less common, and only 4.0 percent of students reported that they experienced hitting or kicking. The percentages were similar among fifth and sixth graders.

Due to the different time spans for measuring *Ijime* between the TIMSS

[3] Olweus (1999, 11) defined bullying as "1) aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing 2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time 3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power."

(1 month) and this national survey (4 months), these statistics cannot be compared. However, these statistics showed that *Ijime* is common both at elementary and middle schools, and it most frequently takes the forms of verbal abuse, physical violence, and social exclusion. As for the location of *Ijime*, 74.9 percent of students reported that it happened "in homeroom" and 29.7 percent reported that it took place "in hallway[s] or around stairs," based on multiple-response choices (Morita et al. 1999a). These findings support the studies conducted by Akiba (2004) and Kanetsuna and Smith (2002), which showed that most *Ijime* cases occurred within a peer group in the same classroom.

Individual Characteristics of Students Involved in School Bullying

Japanese bullies most often target students of the same gender, and male and female students have different patterns of bullying and violent behaviors. Research on gender differences in the nature of *Ijime* has revealed that girls are more likely to engage in peer exclusion than boys and that boys are more likely to engage in physical violence and violent threats than girls (Morita et al. 1999b; Akiba 2004; Shimizu et al. 2006). The same gender pattern applies to students in Israel (Last and Avital 1995; Benbenishty and Astor 2005), France (Fabre-Cornali et al. 1999), Germany (Losel and Bliesener 1999), and the United States (Crick and Grotpeter 1995).

Research findings on the relationship between parents' education level or socioeconomic status (SES) and bullying have been inconsistent. On the one hand, studies in Scotland (Mellor 1999), France (Fabre-Cornali et al. 1999), and the Netherlands (Veenstra et al. 2005) showed that both bullies and victims are from low-SES or unemployed families. On the other hand, SES or parents' education level had no or weak association with students' perpetration or victimization of bullying in Norway and Sweden (Olweus 1999), Germany (Losel and Bliesener 1999), and Canada (Ma 2001, 2002).

Little is known about the SES of bullies or victims in Japan because school administrators are reluctant to let researchers collect data on socioeconomic status or parental education levels. The students with low SES have limited access to outside school learning opportunities through *Juku* (cram schools) or tutoring to enhance their chances for success in high school entrance examinations. If this inequality is associated with students' involvement in *Ijime*, it is possible that bullies are likely to come from low-SES families.

Ando et al. (2005) found that self-reported academic performance was not significantly associated with student perpetration of physical, verbal, or indirect bullying after controlling for other factors in a survey of 2,923 middle school students. A survey of 922 students in two middle schools conducted by Akiba and Shimizu (2006) similarly found no association between performance on a standardized exam and *Ijime* victimization or perpetration, although *Ijime* perpetrators did have lower academic aspirations. In the

United States, South Korea (Kim and Kim 1999; Park and Kim 2001), and European countries (Junger-Tas et al. 1994), low academic achievement is associated with both victimization and bullying.[4]

Another important individual characteristic of students involved in *Ijime* is their value of schooling. It is often argued that academic pressure over high school entrance examinations causes students to lose interest in and devalue the academic experience, which in turn may lead them to engage in *Ijime* (Yoneyama and Naito 2003). Akiba and Shimizu (2006) showed that bullies were more likely than other students to perceive that their school work was not important for their future success. This tendency for bullies to devalue schooling is also consistent with the previous findings that lower levels of sense of school belonging or bonding, school maladjustment, and school alienation were associated with bullying in Australia (Rigby and Slee 1991), Norway (Natvig et al. 2001), the United States (Haynie et al. 2001), as well as in a comparative study of 25 countries (Nansel et al. 2004). Thus, we could expect that bullies in Japan are likely to report a negative value of schooling. Little is known about the value of schooling among victims in other countries. In Japan, Akiba and Shimizu (2006) found that there was no statistically significant relationship between the value of schooling and victimization.

Based on these previous empirical studies, we decided to include as control variables six individual characteristics of victims and bullies: gender, grade level, SES, academic aspiration, grade point average (GPA), and student value of schooling. Our major focus is on the association between student-teacher relationships and student involvement in *Ijime*. We also considered the students' grade levels (grades 7–9) to control for different rates in victimization and bullying.

Japanese Teachers' Roles and *Ijime*

Homeroom teachers have unique roles in Japan because they provide guidance in students' psychological and social development in addition to the students' academic development.[5] When a student in the homeroom engages in a problem behavior such as *Ijime* or vandalism, the homeroom teacher will be notified first. The homeroom teacher then discusses the problem with the students in the homeroom and seeks a group decision on how to solve the problem. This intervention is based on the widely held assumption that problem behaviors emerge as a result of detachment from the homeroom and the belief of Japanese teachers in general that a homeroom as a group can most effectively deal with student problems (Lewis 1995;

[4] For the United States, see Buhs and Ladd (2001), Graham et al. (2003), Juvonen et al. (2000), and Schwartz et al. (2005).

[5] See LeTendre (1994, 1995, 2000) and Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001).

LeTendre 2000). When a problem is serious and the homeroom teacher judges that it is beyond the homeroom's ability to solve, the teacher brings the issue to a grade committee composed of the teachers in the same grade level or to the student guidance committee, which is composed of homeroom teachers and the student guidance chair. The teachers on the grade committee support the homeroom teacher by discussing strategies and keeping an eye on the victim or bully's behaviors during club activities or class periods while the homeroom teacher is not around. Thus, while other teachers support the homeroom teacher to deal with *Ijime*, the homeroom teacher takes responsibility for solving the *Ijime* case by directly working with the students involved.

With the emergence of serious problems such as *Ijime* and *Futoko* (long-term absenteeism) since the 1980s, the homeroom teacher system may no longer be effective in addressing these serious problems. Middle school teachers face challenging tasks in their multiple responsibilities of promoting students' academic, social, and psychological development as well as helping students make sense of the conflicting environments of promoting group connection and identity, on the one hand, and developing individual academic goals to prepare for the academic competition of high school entrance examinations, on the other hand. In this study, we focus on three important aspects of student-teacher relationships in Japanese middle schools: (1) teacher bonding, (2) student guidance, and (3) instructional support based on the institutional and cultural environments of Japanese middle schools.

Teacher Bonding

Teacher bonding describes how close students feel to their homeroom teachers and is characterized by students' trust of and respect for their teachers. Strong emotional ties between homeroom teachers and students are considered a critical element of a successful educational process in Japanese schools (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001). When Japanese middle school students have strong bonds with their homeroom teachers, characterized by trust, respect, and the perception of fairness, they have strong emotional ties with them and feel supported in this critical transition phase from elementary school to high school. They are more likely to succeed in making sense of the two competing values of collectivism and individual competitions over high school entrance examinations. Because they are likely to internalize values instilled by the homeroom teachers, they would perceive *Ijime* as wrongdoing and would be less likely to bully others. In contrast, when students have weak bonds with their homeroom teachers, they perceive that their homeroom teachers are not supportive or helpful. These students may be more likely to engage in *Ijime* as a result of their deviation from teacher values as well as their struggles with transition and the development of a coherent identity. *Ijime* victims may also have weaker bonds with teachers

because they may perceive that their teachers could not protect them from bullies.

Student Guidance

When the homeroom teacher is successful in guidance, students will feel that she or he understands their problems and can be asked for help. The students would also trust that their homeroom teacher can effectively solve the problems they are facing, including *Ijime*. Furthermore, the homeroom teacher would effectively form a homeroom community (*Gakkyu-zukuri*) by promoting collaboration and harmony among students. Therefore, students would be less likely to be involved in *Ijime* when they belong to a homeroom community supported by the effective student guidance of the homeroom teacher. We expected to find that bullies and victims were less likely than nonbullies and nonvictims to view their homeroom teachers as effective in student guidance.

Instructional Support

While homeroom teachers provide extra lessons to prepare students for high school entrance examinations before and after school and during the summer, daily instruction is provided mainly by other subject teachers. Only one study from Norway examined the relationship between instructional support and school bullying. Based on a survey of 2,002 students and 99 teachers in Norwegian primary schools, Roland and Galloway (2002) found that successful classroom management was significantly associated with lower classroom rates of bullying. Competence in teaching—student reports of teacher competence in explaining subject matter and pedagogy, group activities, and individual work—was part of the measure of classroom management along with caring for pupils, monitoring, and intervention. They also found based on a path analysis that the relationship between classroom management and classroom rates of bullying was mediated by social structure of the class measured by peer relations, shared norms, and focus on schoolwork.

We expect that students who perceive their teachers as supportive would be less likely to be involved in bullying. These students receive sufficient guidance and support for overcoming the pressure and stress associated with high school entrance examinations. However, the students who receive little guidance or help from teachers face a daunting challenge to succeed academically and to go smoothly through this high-stakes process, which may lead them to be involved in *Ijime*. Thus, bullies in Japanese middle schools would likely report that they do not receive sufficient instructional support from their teachers. As there is no apparent explanation of how the perceived level of instructional support could lead to victimization, we expect that there will be no significant relationship between instructional support and victimization.

Survey Methods

Data Collection

We surveyed students within a single school district located in a central region of Japan. The city served by this school district had a population of 206,661 in 2007, which is larger than the average population size of 134,677 in cities across Japan (Shityouson Jichi Kenkyukai 2007). The city has a major national university that offers a large number of jobs, and its population has grown rapidly during the past 10 years. It has a lower unemployment rate but a higher crime rate than the national average in 2007 (Keisatsucho 2008).

The school district serves 5,269 students in 14 middle schools (grades 7–9). There are 38 elementary schools in the district, and each middle school has between one and six feeder elementary schools. Five middle schools are in urban areas, four are in suburban areas, and five are in rural regions. Nearly all the middle school students in this district advanced to high schools in 2005. The average school size across the 14 middle schools is 452 students, which is larger than the national average of 329 students. However, the student-teacher ratio is similar to the national average. The city enrolls a growing number of non-Japanese citizens due to the increasing number of children of international students enrolled at the university. As of 2007, there were 68 non-Japanese students (1.3 percent) out of the total of 5,269 students in 14 middle schools, which is about twice as many as the national average (0.6 percent; MEXT 2008).

The district offers various programs for supporting schools to deal with *Ijime*. School counselors are assigned to all middle schools, and they spend 1 day a week in each school. In addition, the district assigns school assistants who help students struggling with learning and provide individual consultations to students facing problems. The district also offers telephone and face-to-face counseling 5 days a week on *Ijime*, *Futoko*, delinquency, and other student problems. The district officers visit schools from time to time to provide advice on student guidance with regard to *Ijime* and *Futoko*—the two most prevalent student problems in the district.

We used a multistage sampling method to select students for our survey. Out of 14 middle schools in the district, seven middle schools were randomly selected, and all students in these schools were invited to participate. Three schools are located in urban areas, two schools in suburban areas, and two schools in rural areas. The survey was administered by teachers during the spring of 2006. Teachers were asked to explain to the students that the survey participation is voluntary, to give students sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, and to collect the questionnaires immediately after completion. Teachers then handed the packet to the school administrator who shipped the questionnaires to us.

A total of 3,161 students were invited to participate, and 2,999 students turned in the questionnaires. For the data analysis, missing data were imputed.

Missing cases in six variables—aspiration, GPA, value of schooling, teacher bonding, student guidance, and instructional support—were estimated based on the value of SES. There were no missing cases in SES and *Ijime* variables (victimization and bullying). Because gender was analyzed as dichotomous variables (1 or 0) and cannot be accurately imputed, the missing cases in gender were left as they were. After the imputation of the above-listed six variables, 2,970 cases had complete data, with the final response rates of 94 percent. We used 2,999 cases for the analyses that did not involve the gender variable, and we used 2,970 cases in the analyses of the relationship between gender and *Ijime* involvement.

Our survey instrument was based on the major constructs on student-teacher relationships and bullying identified through a literature review on Japanese education and school bullying. The questionnaire included three constructs: teacher bonding, student guidance, and instructional support. There were three further subscales of teacher bonding: trust, respect, and fairness. For the items on victimization and bullying, the questionnaire asked students about the three most common types of *Ijime*: verbal abuse, physical violence, and peer exclusion. Finally, based on the previous *Ijime* literature and international school bullying literature, the questionnaire included items on the value of schooling and individual characteristics such as gender, grade level, socioeconomic status, academic aspiration, and GPA. The survey items and coding on *Ijime*, student-teacher relationship, and student value of schooling are presented in the appendix (available in the online version of this article).

Questionnaire Design

We developed and analyzed separately three types of *Ijime*: verbal abuse, physical violence, and peer exclusion.[6] In addition to these three types of *Ijime*, we also created an overall measure of victimization and bullying to differentiate the students who had never been involved in *Ijime* and students who had been involved in at least one type of *Ijime*. An examination of three types of *Ijime* as well as overall *Ijime* allows us to examine whether the predictors of *Ijime* differ or resemble across types of *Ijime*.

[6] The reasons for differentiating these three problems are that, first, these three types of school bullying are different behaviors that respectively involve verbal attack, physical attack, and social isolation. Second, previous studies have examined these three types of school bullying separately and found that girls are more likely to be involved in peer exclusion than boys, and boys are more likely than girls to be involved in physical violence than girls. Third, Spearman correlation analyses showed that these three types of *Ijime* behaviors do not necessarily overlap. For victimization, Spearman correlation coefficients were .60 between verbal abuse and physical violence, .43 between physical violence and peer exclusion, and .69 between verbal abuse and peer exclusion. For bullying, Spearman correlation coefficients were .50 between verbal abuse and physical violence, .38 between physical violence and peer exclusion, and .68 between verbal abuse and peer exclusion. While the relationships between verbal abuse and peer exclusion are relatively strong, there are fewer overlaps between physical violence and peer exclusion both for victimization and bullying. Spearson correlation coefficients between victimization and bullying variables were smaller, ranging from .09 to .28.

Victimization.—Three variables measuring verbal abuse, physical violence, and peer exclusion were created based on student responses to the following question: "During the previous 12 months, how often did the following things happened to you: (1) someone verbally abused you, (2) someone hit, slapped, or pushed you, and (3) your friends excluded you from the peer group?" The answer choices were never, 1–2 times, 3–4 times, 5–9 times, and 10 or more times. Due to the highly skewed distribution, the student responses were coded into a dichotomous variable of 0 = never, and 1 = once or more. In addition to these three types of victimization, a variable on overall victimization was created with the coding of 1 = became a victim of at least once type of *Ijime*, and 0 = never been a victim of *Ijime*.

Bullying.—Three variables measuring verbal abuse, physical violence, and peer exclusion were created based on student responses to the following question: "During the previous 12 months, how often did you do the following things: (1) you verbally abused another student, (2) you hit, slapped, or pushed another student, and (3) you excluded your friend from the peer group?" The answer choices were never, 1–2 times, 3–4 times, 5–9 times, and 10 or more times. Due to the highly skewed distribution, the student responses were coded into a dichotomous variable of 0 = never, and 1 = all the others. In addition to these three types of bullying, a variable on overall bullying was created with the coding of 1 = bullied another student using at least one type of *Ijime* and 0 = never bullied another student.

Student-Teacher Relationship

Teacher bonding.—Students were asked how much they agree or disagree with 30 statements about the relationship between them and their homeroom teachers based on three aspects of teacher bonding: trust, respect, and fairness. The responses were coded from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Due to the high correlations of above .70 among three subscales,[7] the mean of the three subscales was computed as a composite measure of teacher bonding (Cronbach's alpha = .95).

Student guidance.—Students were asked how much they agree or disagree with five statements about student guidance practices of their homeroom teachers. The responses were coded from 1 = strong disagree to 5 = strongly agree, and the mean was computed as a composite of student guidance (Cronbach's alpha = .72).

Instructional support.—Students were asked how much they agree or disagree with three statements about instructional support from their teachers. The responses were coded from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, and the mean was computed as a composite of instructional support (Cronbach's alpha = .77).

[7] Pearson r correlation coefficients were .74 between trust and respect, .71 between respect and fairness, and .84 between respect and fairness.

Individual Characteristics

Gender.—Boys were coded 1 and girls 0.

Grade.—Two dummy variables of seventh graders and ninth graders were created with eighth graders as the reference group.

Socioeconomic status.—The measure of students' SES was created using the student-reported data on the education levels of their mother and father (1 = graduated from middle school or less, 2 = graduated from high school, 3 = graduated from community college, 4 = completed a bachelor's degree, and 5 = completed a master's degree or doctoral degree), existence of educational resources at home: computer, study desk/table, dictionary, and encyclopedia set (1 = yes, 0 = no), and the number of books at home (1 = none or very few [0–10 books], 2 = enough to fill one shelf [11–25 books], 3 = enough to fill one bookcase [26–100 books], 4 = enough to fill two bookcases [101–200 books], and 5 = enough to fill three or more bookcases [more than 200 books]). The average of mother and father's education levels, the number of educational resources, and response on the number of books were first summed, and it was standardized around the mean to create a SES measure with the mean of zero and the standard deviation of one.

Academic aspiration.—Students were asked how far in school they expect to go. Their responses were coded as 1 = graduate from middle school, 2 = graduate from high school, 3 = graduate from community college, 4 = complete a bachelor's degree, and 5 = complete a master's degree or doctoral degree.

Grade point average.—Students were asked to report their grades for five core subjects: Japanese, mathematics, science, social studies, and English during the previous semester. Their grades were coded from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The average of the five grades was computed as their GPA.

Student value of schooling.—Students were asked how much they agree or disagree with five statements about their schools (see the appendix, available in the online edition of this article). The responses were coded from 1 = strong disagree to 5 = strongly agree, and the mean was computed as a composite of student value of schooling (Cronbach's alpha = .79).

Data Analysis and Findings

Before addressing our research questions, we examined the rates of victimization and bullying among our sample of seventh, eighth, and ninth graders in seven middle schools. Table 1 presents the overall rates of victimization and bullying for four measures: (1) overall *Ijime*, (2) verbal abuse, (3) physical violence, (4) peer exclusion, and disaggregated rates by gender and grade level. Chi-square tests of percentage differences were conducted between boys and girls, and among seventh graders, eighth graders, and ninth graders, and the results are presented in table 1 as well.

TABLE 1
RATES OF VICTIMIZATION AND BULLYING BY GENDER AND GRADE LEVEL

	Victimization (%)	χ^2 value	Bullying (%)	χ^2 value
Overall *Ijime*:				
All students	31.7		30.6	
By gender:[a]				
Boy	31.9	.03	32.7	7.35**
Girl	31.6		28.1	
By grade level:				
7th grader	36.8	25.24***	34.2	12.10**
8th grader	31.6		30.3	
9th grader	26.4		27.1	
Verbal abuse:				
All students	29.9		28.5	
By gender:[a]				
Boy	29.6	.10	29.6	2.44
Girl	30.2		27.0	
By grade level:				
7th grader	34.6	21.93***	31.8	10.45**
8th grader	29.6		28.1	
9th grader	25.1		25.3	
Physical violence:				
All students	15.7		12.4	
By gender:[a]				
Boy	21.1	70.87***	18.1	101.56***
Girl	9.8		5.9	
By grade level:				
7th grader	20.9	48.45***	16.3	26.65***
8th grader	16.3		11.6	
9th grader	9.7		8.9	
Peer exclusion:				
All students	18.8		18.1	
By gender:[a]				
Boy	15.5	23.44***	16.0	9.29**
Girl	22.4		20.3	
By grade level:				
7th grader	20.7	4.45	19.1	1.11
8th grader	18.5		17.6	
9th grader	17.1		17.6	

[a]Percentages are based on 2,970 cases due to missing cases in gender; all other percentages in the table are based on 2,999 cases.
**$p<.01$.
***$p<.001$.

When we look at the overall rates, 31.7 percent of students experienced *Ijime* victimization and 30.6 percent of students bullied another student at least once during the previous 12 months. A national survey of *Ijime* by Morita et al. (1999a) showed that 11.1–19.3 percent of students reported that they bullied another student, and 9.0–14.2 percent of students reported having become a victim of *Ijime* during the previous 4 months. As our survey asked students about *Ijime* involvement during the previous 12 months, it is natural that greater percentages of students in this study reported victimization and bullying.

The overall rates of *Ijime* by gender showed that a higher percentage of boys (32.7 percent) than girls (28.1 percent) reported having bullied another student, but there was no statistically significant difference in victimization between boys and girls. By grade level, seventh graders had the highest level and ninth graders had the lowest level of victimization and bullying, and the differences were statistically significant.

When we look at the level of victimization and bullying by specific type of *Ijime*, we can see that 29.9 percent of students reported that they had been verbally abused during the previous 12 months, and 28.5 percent of students reported that they had verbally abused another student during the same period.[8] The rates of physical violence and peer exclusion were lower than those of verbal abuse. The percentage of students who reported that they had been victims of physical violence—hitting, slapping, or pushing—was 15.7 percent, and 12.4 percent reported that they had hit, slapped, or pushed another student.[9] The percentage of students who reported that they had been excluded from the peer group was 18.8 percent, and 18.1 percent of students reported that they had excluded a friend from the peer group.[10]

Table 1 also shows that gender and grade patterns differ by the type of school bullying. Boys are significantly more likely than girls to be involved in physical violence as victims or bullies, and girls are significantly more likely than boys to be involved in peer exclusion as victims or bullies. There was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls for verbal abuse. Seventh graders are most likely to be involved in verbal abuse and physical violence, and ninth graders are least likely to be involved in verbal abuse and physical violence. There was no statistically significant difference in the rates of peer exclusion by grade level. These data show the same gender pattern as the previous studies on *Ijime* (Morita et al. 1999b; Akiba 2004; Shimizu et al. 2006). The higher rates of overall *Ijime* among seventh graders compared to eighth and ninth graders were also reported by Morita et al. (1999a). Our data further revealed that there are different gender and grade patterns by the type of *Ijime*.

[8] The breakdowns of the percentages by frequency of verbal abuse not reported in table 1 are 5.2 percent (1–2 times), 6.2 percent (3–4 times), 4.7 percent (5–9 times), and 13.7 percent (10 or more times) for victimization and 6.3 percent (1–2 times), 6.7 percent (3–4 times), 3.8 percent (5–9 times), and 11.7 percent (10 or more times) for bullying.

[9] The breakdowns of the percentages by frequency of physical violence not reported in table 1 are 4.5 percent (1–2 times), 3.4 percent (3–4 times), 2.1 percent (5–9 times), and 5.7 percent (10 or more times) for victimization and 4.7 percent (1–2 times), 2.7 percent (3–4 times), 1.7 percent (5–9 times), and 3.2 percent (10 or more times) for bullying.

[10] The breakdowns of the percentages by frequency of peer exclusion not reported in table 1 are 4.8 percent (1–2 times), 3.6 percent (3–4 times), 3.4 percent (5–9 times), and 6.9 percent (10 or more times) for victimization and 6.5 percent (1–2 times), 3.7 percent (3–4 times), 2.6 percent (5–9 times), and 5.4 percent (10 or more times) for bullying.

TABLE 2
STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN *Ijime*

	Teacher Bonding			Student Guidance			Instructional Support		
	β	SE	Beta	β	SE	Beta	β	SE	Beta
Victimization:									
Verbal abuse	.070	.038	.052	.047	.048	.028	.009	.059	.004
Physical violence	.032	.039	.019	.072	.048	.034	.007	.060	.003
Peer exclusion	−.040	.040	−.025	−.083	.050	−.042	−.068	.061	−.028
R^2		.003			.002			.001	
Bullying:									
Verbal abuse	−.065	.037	−.047	−.062	.046	−.036	−.039	.056	−.019
Physical violence	−.041	.040	−.022	−.026	.049	−.011	−.059	.061	−.020
Peer exclusion	−.128***	.040	−.079	−.070	.050	−.035	−.137*	.062	−.056
R^2		.016			.005			.007	

*$p<.05$.
***$p<.001$.

Association between Student-Teacher Relationship and Victimization/Bullying

To address our first research question, "What relationship do *Ijime* victims and bullies have with school teachers?" we conducted multiple regression analyses separately for three types of student-teacher relationships: (1) teacher bonding, (2) student guidance, and (3) instructional support as dependent variables. We included three types of *Ijime* as independent variables in the models. We conducted the analyses separately for victimization and bullying and presented six models (three models each for victimization and bullying). Standardized coefficients (beta) and coefficient of determination (R^2) were also reported for each model. Table 2 presents multiple regression results of the association between student-teacher relationship and student involvement in *Ijime* as victims or bullies.

After statistically controlling for other types of victimization for each type of victimization, none of the victimization variables was associated with teacher bonding, student guidance, or instructional support. The perceived levels of teacher bonding, student guidance, and student guidance do not differ between victims and nonvictims of *Ijime*. However, for the models for bullying, we found that students who excluded another student from the peer group were likely to have weaker teacher bonding and perceived less instructional support from teachers than other students who are not involved in peer exclusion. The proportions of variation in student-teacher relationship variables explained by victimization or bullying variables were minimal, ranging from .001 to .016.

For the second research question, "How is the student-teacher relationship associated with victimization and bullying, controlling for student background characteristics and attitudes toward schooling?" multiple logistic regression analyses were conducted with the dependent variables of overall measure of *Ijime* and each of the three types of *Ijime* and with independent

variables of three measures of the student-teacher relationship (teacher bonding, student guidance, and instructional support). Student gender, grade level, socioeconomic status, academic aspiration, GPA, and student value of schooling were included as control variables. A total of eight models were estimated, with four models each for victimization and bullying. Based on these estimates, we computed the increased probability of victimization or bullying associated with a one-unit increase in each independent variable. A Negelkerke R^2 (coefficient of determination for multiple logistic regression) is reported for each model. The results for victimization are presented in table 3, and the results for bullying are presented in table 4.

We can see from table 3 that, controlling for other variables, boys are more likely than girls to become the victims of physical violence, and girls are more likely than boys to become the victims of peer exclusion. Table 4 also showed that boys are more likely than girls to inflict physical violence on another student, and girls are more likely than boys to exclude a friend from the peer group. Boys were also found to verbally abuse another student more frequently than girls, once all the other variables were controlled. The overall measure of *Ijime* showed that while there was no gender difference in victimization, boys are more likely to become bullies than girls. The differences by grade level showed the same pattern as in table 1, that seventh graders have the highest level of involvement in victimization or bullying, and ninth graders have the lowest level of *Ijime* involvement in overall *Ijime*, verbal abuse, and physical violence. There was no statistically significant difference in the rates of peer exclusion by grade level, both for victimization and bullying.

Lower socioeconomic status increases the probability of becoming a bully but not of becoming a victim. Students with low SES were more likely than students with high SES to bully others using physical violence and peer exclusion. This pattern applied to overall *Ijime* as well. Academic aspiration was not significantly associated with either victimization or bullying, except that bullies of physical violence had significantly lower aspirations than nonbullies. Grade point average, however, was significantly associated with victimization. Victims of every type of *Ijime* had lower GPA than nonvictims, while there was no statistically significant relationship between GPA and student involvement in *Ijime* as bullies.

Student value of schooling, measured by the extent to which students see the importance of schooling, was significantly associated with both victimization and bullying. Victims of verbal abuse, physical violence, and peer exclusion, as well as overall *Ijime*, possessed lower value of schooling than nonvictims. Bullies also share the same characteristic—those who verbally abuse and inflict violence on another student are less likely than nonbullies to see the value of schooling, although bullies involved in peer exclusion did not have a different value of schooling from nonbullies.

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND *Ijime* VICTIMIZATION

	Victimization											
	Overall *Ijime*			Verbal Abuse			Physical Violence			Peer Exclusion		
	β	SE	Prob.[a]	β	SE	Prob.	β	SE	Prob.	β	SE	Prob.
Individual characteristic:												
Gender	.00	.08	.00	−.04	.08	−.01	.92***	.11	.22	−.47***	.10	−.12
Grade 7	.22*	.10	.05	.22*	.10	.05	.31**	.12	.08	.14	.12	.03
Grade 9	−.26*	.10	−.06	−.24*	.10	−.06	−.65***	.12	−.16	−.09	.12	−.02
SES	.02	.05	.01	.02	.05	.01	.07	.06	.02	.06	.05	.02
Academic aspiration	−.02	.05	.00	.01	.05	.00	−.08	.06	−.02	.01	.06	.00
GPA	−.20***	.05	−.05	−.23***	.05	−.06	−.20***	.06	−.05	−.17**	.06	−.04
Value of schooling	−.17**	.06	−.04	−.19***	.06	−.05	−.24***	.08	−.06	−.16*	.07	−.04
Student-teacher relationship:												
Teacher bonding	.27***	.08	.07	.27***	.09	.07	.23*	.11	.06	.23*	.10	.06
Student guidance	.05	.07	.01	.05	.07	.01	.09	.09	.02	.01	.09	.00
Instructional support	−.10	.06	−.02	−.08	.06	−.02	−.08	.07	−.02	−.09	.07	−.02
Negelkerke R^2	.09			.10			.27			.08		

NOTE.—All analyses are based on 2,970 cases. SE = standard error; SES = socioeconomic status; GPA = grade point average.

[a]The probability increase in victimization with a one-unit increase in each independent variable controlling for other independent variables was computed based on the equation $\exp(B)/[1+\exp(B)]-.50$. The negative sign in the probability indicates that the probability of victimization decreases for the indicated amount with a one-unit increase in X.

*$p<.05$.

**$p<.01$.

***$p<.001$.

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND BULLYING

	Bullying											
	Overall *Ijime*			Verbal Abuse			Physical Violence			Peer Exclusion		
	β	SE	Prob.[a]	β	SE	Prob.	β	SE	Prob.	β	SE	Prob.
Individual characteristic:												
Gender	.26***	.08	.07	.17*	.08	.04	1.37***	.13	.30	−.27**	.10	−.07
Grade 7	.27**	.10	.07	.27**	.10	.07	.55***	.14	.13	.22	.12	.05
Grade 9	−.22*	.10	−.05	−.20	.11	−.05	−.38*	.16	−.09	−.05	.12	−.01
SES	−.12**	.05	−.03	−.08	.05	−.02	−.15*	.07	−.04	−.11*	.05	−.03
Academic aspiration	−.04	.05	−.01	−.05	.05	−.01	−.16*	.07	−.04	−.04	.06	−.01
GPA	−.07	.05	−.02	−.07	.05	−.02	−.06	.07	−.02	−.04	.06	−.01
Value of schooling	−.11	.06	−.03	−.12*	.06	−.03	−.17*	.08	−.04	−.13	.07	−.03
Student-teacher relationship:												
Teacher bonding	−.36***	.09	−.09	−.40***	.09	−.10	−.43***	.12	−.10	−.49***	.10	−.12
Student guidance	−.04	.07	−.01	.00	.07	.00	−.06	.10	−.01	.09	.09	.02
Instructional support	.01	.06	.00	.02	.06	.01	.05	.08	.01	−.03	.07	−.01
Negelkerke R^2	.12			.11			.36			.11		

NOTE.—All analyses are based on 2,970 cases. SE = standard error; SES = socioeconomic status; GPA = grade point average.

[a]The probability increase in bullying with a one-unit increase in each independent variable controlling for other independent variables was computed based on the equation $\exp(B)/[1+\exp(B)]-.50$. The negative sign in the probability indicates that the probability of bullying decreases for the indicated amount with a one-unit increase in X.

*$p<.05$.

**$p<.01$.

***$p<.001$.

When three measures of student-teacher relationship were estimated in the same equation (i.e., controlling for one another), only teacher bonding showed a statistically significant relationship with victimization and bullying. Victims reported a significantly higher level of teacher bonding than nonvictims, and bullies reported a significantly lower level of teacher bonding than nonbullies. This pattern was consistent across three types of *Ijime* as well as overall measure of *Ijime*. There was no statistically significant relationship between *Ijime* involvement and student guidance or instructional support. These results show the importance of teacher bonding as a predictor of student involvement in victimization and bullying.

We can see from the probabilities for teacher bonding in table 3 that when the level of teacher bonding increases one unit, the probability of becoming victims of *Ijime* increases as much as .06 to .07. This translates into a .24–.28 difference in the probability of becoming victims between the students with the lowest level of teacher bonding (coded as 1) and the students with the highest level of teacher bonding (coded as 4). The relationship between teacher bonding and bullying was even stronger as we can see from table 4. With a one-unit increase in teacher bonding, the students' probability of bullying another student decreases as much as .09–.12. This means that the students with the weakest teacher bonding have .36–.48 higher probabilities of becoming bullies than the students with the strongest teacher bonding. Negelkerke R^2 values showed that the proportion of variation explained by the independent and control variables ranged from .08 to .27 for victimization and from .11 to .36 for bullying. The largest proportions of variation were explained for physical violence victimization (.27) and perpetration (.36).

In sum, these analyses revealed important characteristics of victims and bullies in Japanese middle schools. In general, physical violence is more common among boys than girls, and peer exclusion is more common among girls than boys. Seventh graders have a higher probability to be involved in *Ijime* as victims or bullies than eighth or ninth graders. Victims and bullies share the same characteristic in their devaluation of schooling. However, victims reported strong teacher bonding, while bullies reported weak teacher bonding. Bullies tend to come from low-SES families, but they did not have low academic aspirations or GPAs. Socioeconomic standing and academic aspiration did not predict students' likelihood for becoming victims, but victims have lower GPAs than nonvictims.

Discussion

This study focused on an important yet often overlooked association between student-teacher relationships and victimization and bullying. We found that students who excluded another student from their peer group were likely to have weaker teacher bonding and to perceive less instructional

support than the students not involved in peer exclusion. When these relationships were examined through multiple logistic regression analyses controlling for student gender, grade level, SES, academic aspiration, GPA, and value of schooling, we found that only teacher bonding was significantly associated with student victimization and bullying.

Ijime victims and bullies had an opposite characteristic in the level of teacher bonding, with victims showing stronger teacher bonding than nonvictims and bullies showing weaker teacher bonding than nonbullies. This study does not directly explain why bullies have weaker teacher bonding and victims have stronger teacher bonding than other students. However, the findings that victims are low achievers and bullies tend to come from low-SES families may help understand the different level of teacher bonding between victims and bullies.

Japanese middle school teachers tend to pay attention to low achievers because these students struggle the most in developing self-confidence in the environment with an increasing focus on academics during the middle school years (LeTendre 2000). This teacher attention on low-achieving students may have led to stronger bonding between the victims and the homeroom teacher. Bullies are not low achievers, thus they do not receive such attentions from their homeroom teachers. Yet, they come from low-SES families, and they may perceive that they are disadvantaged in academic competition over high school entrance examinations because their parents may not be able to afford a high *Juku* tuition or tutoring expense. Bullies may perceive that the students who are low achievers but do not come from low-SES families are receiving unfair attention and support of the homeroom teacher, which gives them an advantage in their entrance into high school. Bullies may also perceive that the student who devalues schooling yet shows strong teacher bonding is being contradictory or a traitor. These perceptions of bullies could lead to bullying as a strategy or a reaction to gain back a power over the victim in the peer group.

Another interpretation is that the victims could have developed stronger teacher bonding as a result of the teacher's successful intervention of bullying. However, this interpretation is unlikely to be supported because victims did not report positive guidance from teachers, as shown in the lack of a significant relationship between student guidance and victimization status explained below. The previous case studies of *Ijime* also showed, despite the expected cultural role, the limited actual role played by teachers to intervene in cases of *Ijime* (Akiba 2004; LeTendre 2000) due to the complexity of the problem that requires involvement of specialists such as counselors, social workers, or police. While we cannot establish a causal relationship between teacher bonding and students' involvement in *Ijime* from our data, teacher bonding is an important factor we need to pay attention to in our efforts in *Ijime* prevention and intervention.

Student reports of student guidance and instructional support were not significantly associated with victimization or bullying once individual characteristics were controlled. The lack of a significant relationship between student guidance and victimization or bullying was surprising given the important role homeroom teachers play in supporting their students' mental health and developing classroom community. However, when compared to teacher bonding, perceived effectiveness in student guidance may not be as important as how close students feel to their homeroom teachers. Students may perceive that their teachers are effective in student guidance, but they may not feel the connection with them unless they trust and respect their teachers.

The role of school teachers to provide instructional support may not be as critical for students' success in high school entrance examinations when many students are receiving instructional support from *Juku* instructors or tutors. It is also a common understanding among students and their families that school work alone is never sufficient for success in high school entrance examinations, and national statistics showed that 51 percent of middle school students were attending *Juku* in 2005 (Shimizu et al. 2006). Therefore, the level of instructional support provided by their teachers may not have a major impact on students' preparation for high school entrance examinations.

Before discussing the implications of these findings, it is important to point out the limitation of this study. We used cross-sectional survey data collected from a single district, thus the generalizability of the findings is limited. While this district shared similar characteristics in many aspects as the national average, it is located in a relatively large city with lower unemployment rates and yet with higher crime rates than the national average. Thus, the findings are only applicable to similar cities in Japan. It is important that future studies on *Ijime* attempt to collect data from a nationally representative sample to understand accurate national rates of *Ijime*.

Despite this limitation, the study is the first to closely examine the student-teacher relationship in relation to student involvement in *Ijime* in Japanese middle school contexts. This study is also unique because of the inclusion of data on students' socioeconomic status—a factor rarely examined in previous *Ijime* studies. A large sample size also allowed the authors to control for student characteristics in examining the association between student-teacher relationships and victimization or bullying.

The findings from this study have important implications for policy and practice on *Ijime* prevention and intervention. Our data showed that both victims and bullies are more likely than other students to devalue schooling. When students do not see the value of schooling, they are more likely to experience boredom and frustration at school. It would be important for homeroom teachers to be cognizant of students who show the signs of devaluation of schooling. Japanese middle schools have traditionally empha-

sized the balance between academic and social development by providing rich social experiences through club activities, school events, and school trips. With the reforms during the past 20 years of school week reductions from 6 days to 5 days, and the reduction of club activities on weekends, it has been reported that less time is dedicated for social development at school than before (Akiba 2004). These reform directions pose a challenge for schools and teachers to enhance students' opportunities for social development. Despite the challenge, offering social activities that are aligned with students' interests is a promising way to help students see the value of schooling and to prevent further detachment from school.

Dealing with each *Ijime* case requires a significant amount of time and energy from homeroom teachers. With about one-third of students in the homeroom experiencing victimization and one-third acting as bullies, it is not realistic to expect the homeroom teacher to take the responsibility for all *Ijime* cases. There needs to be a system to divide responsibilities among homeroom teachers, administrators, and psychological professionals, while keeping homeroom teachers well informed of the process and progress once the case leaves the hands of homeroom teachers. The fact that teacher bonding is an important predictor of student victimization and bullying shows that homeroom teachers need to play an important role in the prevention of *Ijime* through constant communication with students. The reduction of homeroom size or the assignment of multiple homeroom teachers to each homeroom would be necessary to enhance student-teacher communications. However, once *Ijime* occurs in a homeroom, it should be reported to an administrator or a guidance committee, and the homeroom teacher should consult with school counselors, social workers, or police, depending on the nature of *Ijime*.

The findings from this study also provide an important research implication for other countries that struggle with school bullying. Most existing studies have overlooked the importance of teachers' roles in predicting student involvement in school bullying and instead focused on student characteristics and family background. As school bullying occurs in a confined school environment, school staff plays a critical role in the identification, prevention, and intervention of bullying.

Previous studies examined student-teacher relationships only as part of school belonging or adjustment and did not separate teacher effects from school effects. Teachers spend the largest amount of time with students in any school context, thus they can most effectively identify any signs of bullying happening among students. It is important that school bullying research in other countries investigate the associations between student-teacher relationships and student involvement in school bullying.

In addition, it is important to identify the specific nature of student-teacher relationships based on teachers' roles in each sociocultural context and to examine specific aspects of student-teacher relationships in relation

to student involvement in school bullying. In Japan, developing strong bonds with students is important for an effective educational process. However, in other countries, teachers may mainly take the instructional responsibility and leave disciplinary decisions involving bullying to school counselors or administrators. If so, a measure of how teachers refer cases and work with school counselors or administrators needs to be examined instead of examining how teachers deal with bullying cases by themselves. Our study showed that there is strong relationship between teacher bonding and student involvement in victimization and bullying in Japan. It is important to examine whether this relationship holds true in other national contexts. This relationship was revealed probably because of the unique nature of homeroom teachers' responsibilities and their relationship with students in Japan. In other contexts, the role of school counselors or administrators may prove more important than teacher bonding. Continued investigation of specific roles of teachers, school counselors, and administrators in educating students academically and socially in relation to student involvement in school bullying will have important practical implications for creating safe classroom and school environments free from school bullying.

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