

# **Shame Management and Bullying: Stability and Variability Over Time**

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**There were two objectives of this study:**

- 1. to explore the stability of children's bullying status (bully, victim, bully/victim, non-bully / non-victim) across a 3-year time span; and**
- 2. to explore the extent to which children's shame management skills relate to their bullying status across a 3-year time span.**

## **What is shame management?**

**Shame management is the ways to manage shame following a wrongdoing. Shame management can be understood as the process we use to rationalize wrongdoing that threatens our ethical identity. Shame is what we feel when we breach a set of social and moral norms and standards. We all violate such norms (at least to some extent) at one time or another. The important question is how we rationalize our wrongdoings, and also how we manage our shame over them.**

**ADAPTIVE ways to manage shame:**

- to admit “Yes, I have done wrong and I am ashamed of it”;
- to take responsibility for the harm done; and
- to make amends for the harm done.

**CONSEQUENCES: Shame is discharged, reconciliation and reintegration take place. Therefore, maintaining adaptive social relationships becomes possible. In the initial study, we have identified this pattern among non-bully / non-victims.**

**MALADAPTIVE ways to manage shame:**

**1. self-critical thoughts of others' rejection**

**CONSEQUENCES: Feeling rejected and alienated. Therefore, maintaining adaptive social relationships becomes difficult. We have identified this pattern among victims.**

**2. Unacknowledging shame, externalizing blame and anger.**

**CONSEQUENCES: Feeling of unfairness, blaming others, wanting to take revenge, and alienation. Therefore, maintaining adaptive social relationships becomes difficult. We have identified this pattern among bullies.**

## **METHOD:**

- **In 1996, 978 families participated in the Life at School Survey (for details, see <http://crj.anu.edu.au> or <http://regnet.anu.edu.au>)**
- **59.40% (581 families) agreed to participate in the follow-up survey**
- **63.3% (368 families) returned their completed questionnaires**

**Results from the initial research in 1996:**

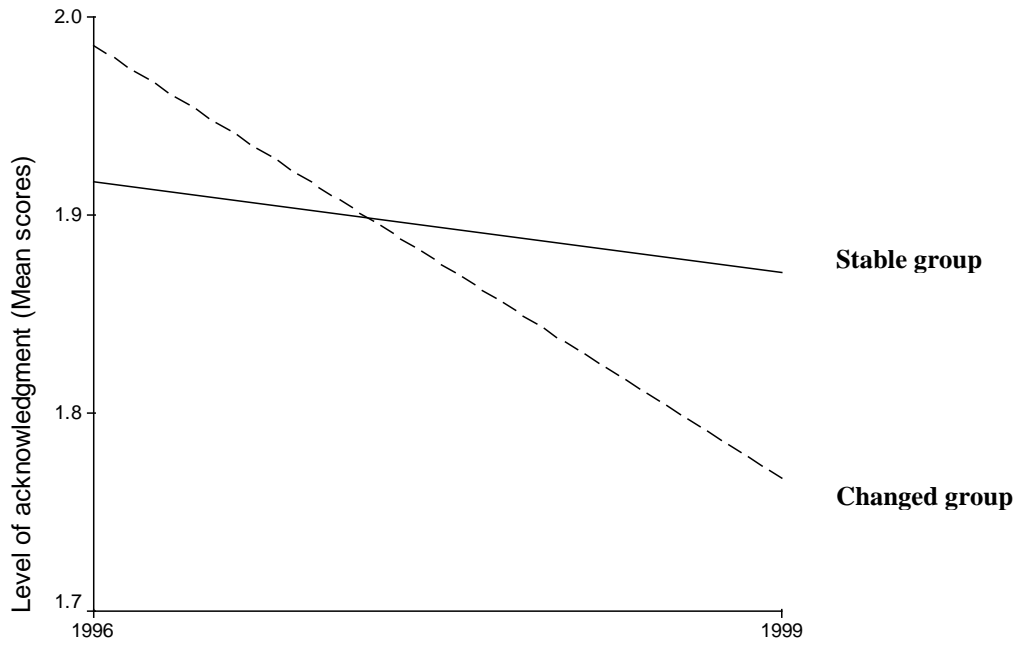
- 1. non-bully / non-victims acknowledge shame with no displacement.**
- 2. bullies do not acknowledge shame but displace their shame by externalizing blame and anger.**
- 3. victims acknowledge shame with excessive self-critical thoughts.**
- 4. bully / victims share shame management skills of both the bullies and the victims.**

**How stable is a child's bullying status across time?**

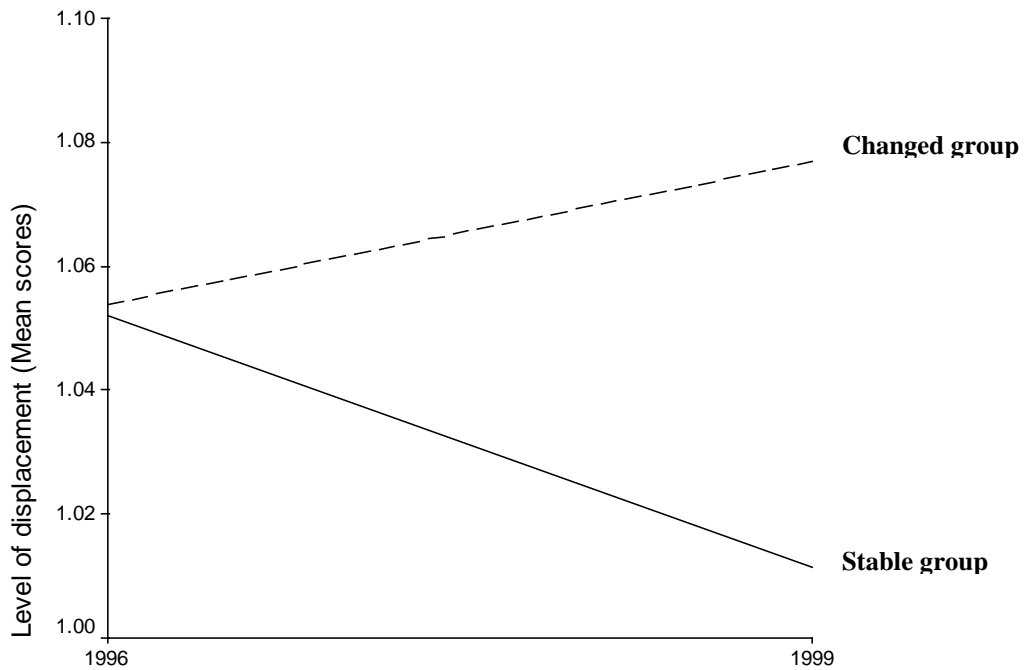
**Table 1 A comparison of children's bullying status between 1996 and 1999.**

<b>Years / Bullying status</b>	<b>Non-bully / non-victim</b>	<b>Bully</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Bully/victim</b>
<b>Number of children in 1996</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Number of children in 1999</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Percentage of remaining children in the same status</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>21%</b>

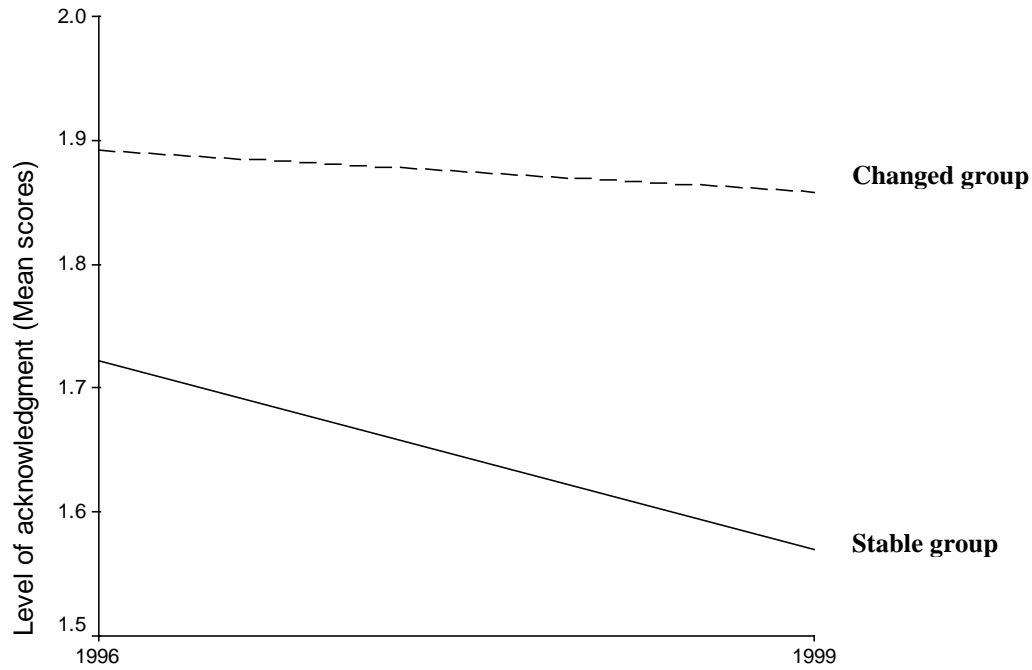




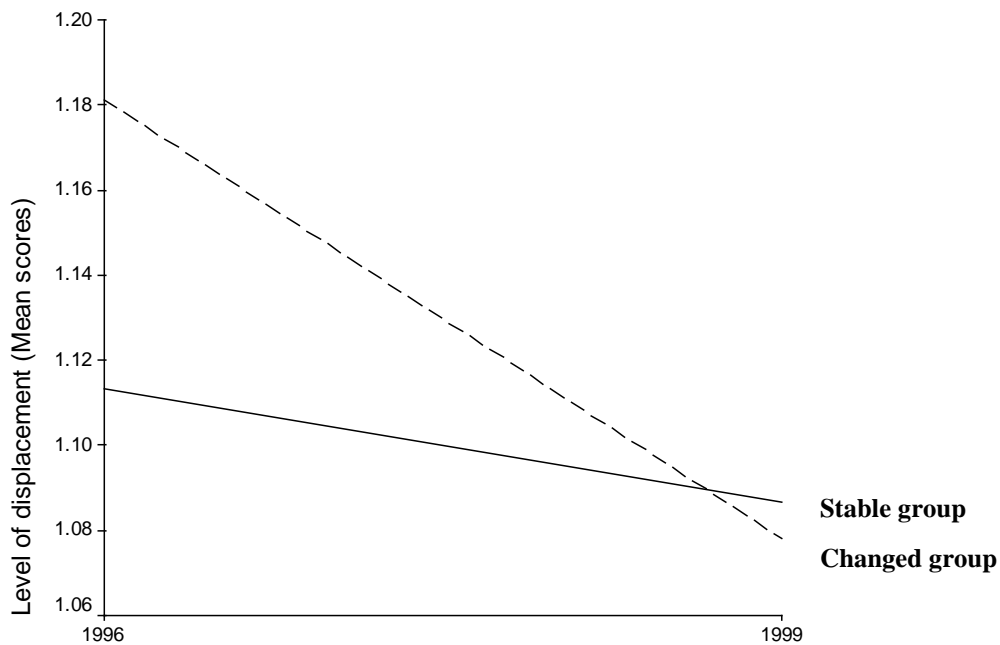
**Figure 1: Means of Shame Acknowledgment in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed non-bully / non-victims.**



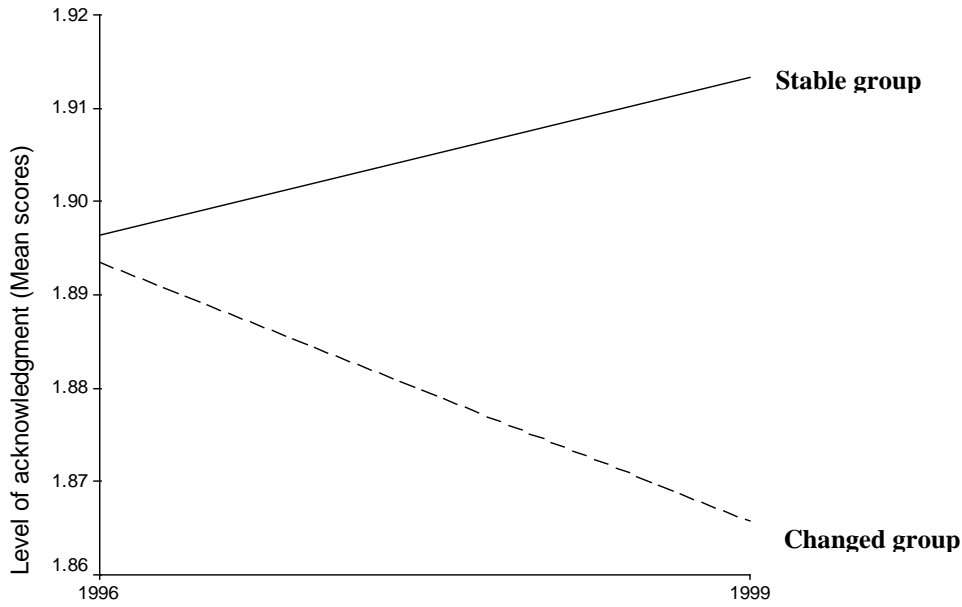
**Figure 2: Means of Shame Displacement in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed non-bully / non-victims.**



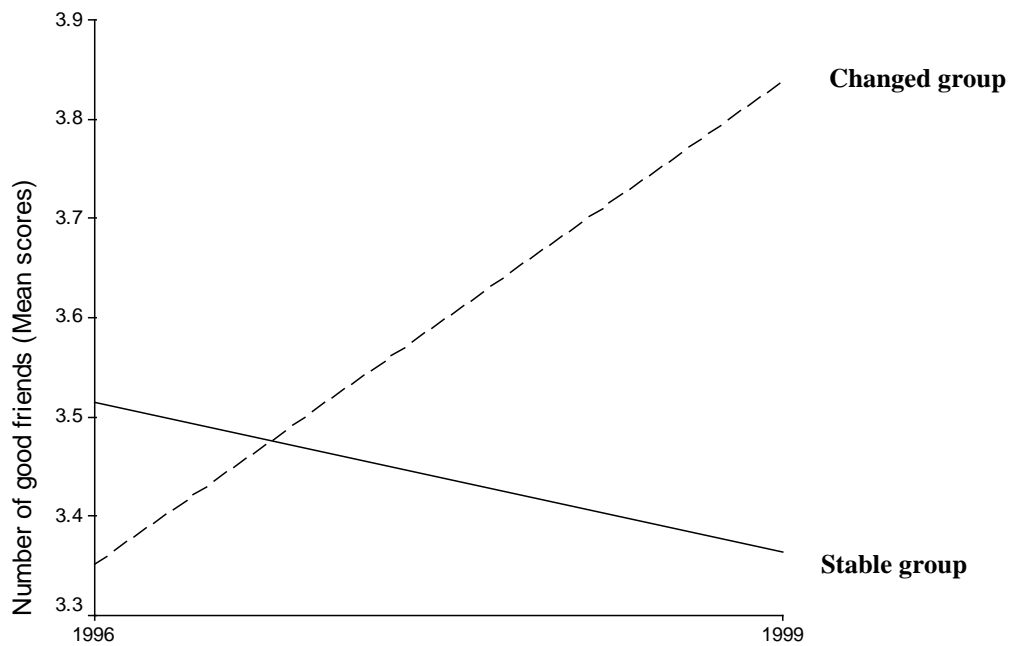
**Figure 3: Means of Shame Acknowledgment in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed bullies.**



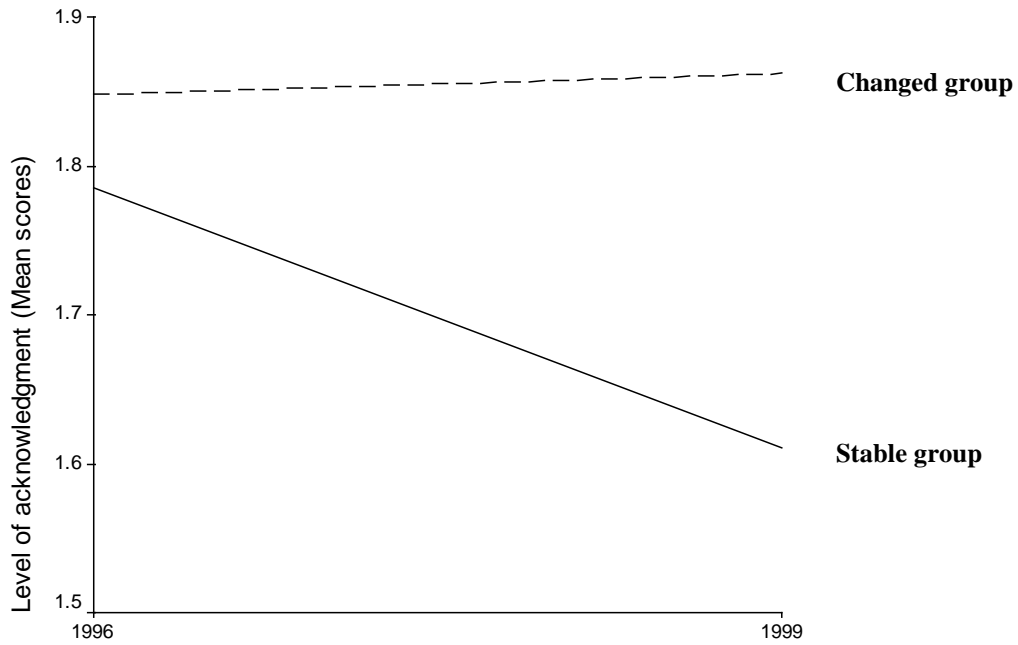
**Figure 4: Means of Shame Displacement in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed bullies.**



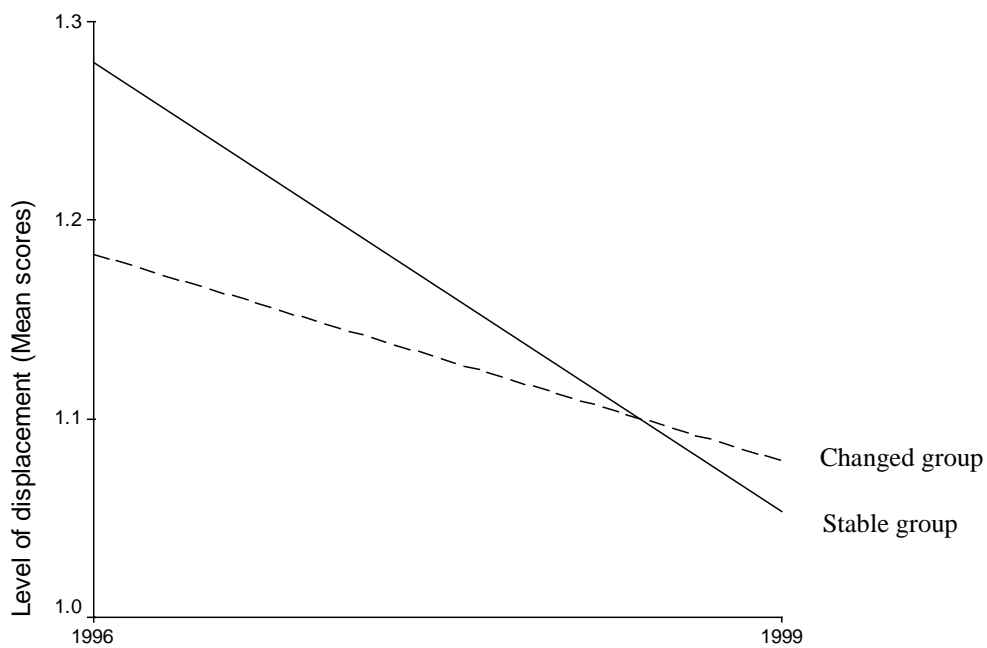
**Figure 5: Means of Shame Acknowledgment in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed victims.**



**Figure 6: Mean number of good friends in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed victims.**



**Figure 7: Means of shame acknowledgment in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed bully/victims.**



**Figure 8: Means of shame displacement in 1996 and in 1999 for stable and changed bully/victims.**

**Table 2 Summary of the obtained findings.**

<b>Bullying status</b>	<b>What was found</b>
<b>Non-bully / non-victims</b>	<b>Stable group continues to show <u>adaptive shame management</u></b>
<b>Bullies</b>	<b>Stable group continues to show <u>poor shame management</u></b>
<b>Victims</b>	<b>Stable group continues to show <u>poor shame management</u></b>
<b>Bully/victims</b>	<b>Stable group continues to show <u>poor shame management</u></b>

**This research demonstrates three important findings -**

- 1. Shame management skills are related to bullying/victimization;**
- 2. Shame management skills change over time as does bullying status; and**
- 3. Children who remain in the three troubled categories (bullies, victims and bully/victim) have distinctive patterns of poor shame management.**

**The implications of these findings for bullying interventions -**

- 1. Interventions should incorporate the concept of shame management skills to empower children in building resilience against bullying/victimization.**
- 2. Interventions should focus upon exposing children-at-risk to early intervention before any maladaptive patterns become entrenched.**
- 3. Interventions should adopt a shame management approach within a whole school approach.**