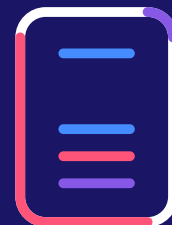


FOCUS ON: BULLYING 2023

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This edition of **Focus on: Bullying** summarises publications, especially journal articles, on bullying in the UK (or involving UK participants) published during 2023. Following the similar Focus on: Bullying reports released annually since 2017, it is restricted to research relevant to children and young people, including students in higher or further education, and to studies which had bullying as a primary or substantial focus. I have endeavoured to cover major contributions using search engines and databases, but inevitably a few may have been missed. Research has become increasingly international in scope, and with many systematic reviews and meta-analyses; I have included these when at least some of the reports included were from the UK.

An overview of how the bullying research program has developed internationally, the main content areas of research, and the kinds of interventions used to reduce school bullying, is provided in [1].

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CONTEXT: GOVERNMENT

The main Department for Education guidance for England remains unchanged, at <https://www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school>; it covers The law; Reporting bullying; Bullying outside school; Bullying – a definition. Advice from the Scottish Government

covers a wide range of resources; <https://education.gov.scot/resources/bullying/>. Similarly the Welsh Government, <https://www.gov.wales/school-bullying>, and in Northern Ireland, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/dealing-bullying#toc-1>

PREVALENCE

A study of 16,940 children and young people aged 8–18 years [2], in England, examined the incidence and relationships of a number of factors affecting wellbeing, in June–July 2020, shortly after the first Covid-19 lockdown of March 2020. About one-third reported a decrease in mental wellbeing, one third no change, and one-third an increase in mental wellbeing – the latter perhaps related to strengthened family bonds and enjoyment of self-directed learning. Bullying at school in the past year was reported by about 17% of pupils, with about 5% saying this was most days or every day. All groups reported less bullying in lockdown, but mental wellbeing was much more likely to have improved when bullying was not experienced frequently (whereas wellbeing got worse if bullying was taking place).

Bullying is one type of violence, and a meta-analysis of 23 studies of self-reported violence against children under 18 years in the U.K [3] found that bullying was the second most common of nine types, after community violence. From 15 studies, the prevalence was 22.75% for all types of bullying. These percentages refer to the percentage of the whole sample who reported experiences of types of victimisation. This was for all types of bullying – prevalence was much higher for traditional (face-to-face) bullying (32.66% from 10 studies) than for cyberbullying (3.98% from 5 studies), although the authors caution that in some studies, cyberbullying might have been included in assessments of traditional bullying. Bullying was reported slightly more by girls (24.76%)

than by boys (22.24%) based on 7 studies.

The relatively small prevalence of cyberbullying was also found in a nationally representative sample (n=230,735) from Wales of 11–16 year olds [4]. Assessments of emotional problems and social relationships including bullying, were obtained in 2013, 2017, and 2019. Overall experiencing frequent traditional bullying prevalence was 14.2% and frequent cyberbullying prevalence was 5.74%. Although emotional problems increased over time these changes were not found to be related to bullying. The rates of both traditional and cyberbullying follow a curving pattern over the three years, even though this wasn't highlighted in the analysis. For traditional bullying, the rates are 12.71 in the first year, rising to 14.71 in the second, then falling to 13.81 in the third. For



cyberbullying, the rates are 4.52, increasing to 6.20, and then dropping to 5.43. Another study in Wales [5] used the 2017 data set to examine experiences of children in care (see Groups at Risk later) or not in care. For those not in care, 35.4% reported being bullied (all kinds) and 15.6% as bullying others; 19.0% as having been cyberbullied and 9.0% cyberbullying others; these rather high figures are partly due to a lenient criterion of these happening 'once or more' (repetition was not necessary).

The second phase of the Anti-Bullying Alliance's (ABA's) United Against Bullying programme collected Pupil Wellbeing, Victimization and Bullying others data from 65,061 children from 335 schools between Nov 2022 and June 2023 [6]. The key findings from this phase show that 23% of pupils reported frequently being bullied and 6% admitted to frequently bullying others. Pupils with Special Educational Needs or in receipt of Free School Meals were more likely to report experiencing frequent victimisation (29% and 28% respectively), but also higher levels of frequently bullying others (10% and 8% respectively). Pupils who experienced bullying either face to face or online reported poorer school experience and poorer wellbeing overall. This was particularly marked for secondary school pupils compared to pupils attending primary or infant schools. Prevalence varies with age through childhood and adolescence; a thorough survey of these trends, from large multi-country surveys such as HBSC, was reported in [7]. There is generally a downward trend with age for reports of victimisation, but often upward for perpetration, especially for boys; there is more often a peak for both with girls at 13 years (up from 11 years, and down again at 15 years). These gender differences are most marked in the last 2 HBSC survey periods of 2013/14 and 2017/18. The authors discuss these findings in relation to both timing of puberty, and interest in social media sites being higher in girls.



"The key findings from this phase show that 23% of pupils reported frequently being bullied and 6% admitted to frequently bullying others. Pupils with Special Educational Needs or in receipt of Free School Meals were more likely to report experiencing frequent victimisation (29% and 28% respectively)"

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

The traditional definition of bullying, from the work of Olweus, includes the criteria of intent to harm, repetition, and imbalance of power. Continuing issues around this are the applicability of the traditional definition to cyberbullying; and whether young people use the same definition as adults/researchers. Both are brought together in a study of 11-17 year olds from 2 schools in the north-west of England [8]. The author explored their understandings of what was cyberbullying, using focus groups and interviews. 'Young people ranked cyberbullying as one of the top threats online' (p.8). Key characteristics were: intention to harm or humiliate; the victim cannot escape from the activity or activities perpetrated against them; attempts to transfer power from victims to perpetrators; and the perpetrator hides behind the screen.

The concept of power in bullying is given an analysis from a Foucauldian approach (for Foucault, power is not held by individuals but operates through institutional and social norms which influence thoughts and behaviour and can contribute to bullying) in [9]. This article considers how pupils are placed into hierarchies based on their intellectual ability; power struggles between pupils and teachers; punishment; and the exercise of power through popularity. It continues by considering how power can be resisted through schools de-centralising decision-making centres for pupils to exercise their voice; pupils being enabled to transform themselves; and learning about

"Young people ranked cyberbullying as one of the top threats online"

how power can influence relationships. The practical challenges of resistance towards tackling bullying are presented.

Nassem (2023) used case studies of strategies she developed to address bullying using a Foucauldian approach of analysing and reconstructing power relations with pupils. This involved group work with pupils and a mentoring programme for pupils who persistently engaged in bullying. It also involved working with school staff to improve strategies to tackle bullying such as facilitating meetings with pupils and school staff, and pupil-led assemblies on bullying. Pupils who participated in bullying who engaged in bullying refrained from engaging in bullying or substantially reduced it. They were more reflective of their behaviour, improved how they responded to conflict, and were more respectful and inclusive towards individuals who were victimised. However, there did not appear to be substantial changes in how school staff responded to bullying. It is concluded that a Foucauldian approach provides implications for how individuals can resist power

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through their relations with others within an institution which many feel dominated.

The criteria of intent and repetition come into consideration in two articles discussing the 'blurred line' between bullying and banter, in the context of sporting activities [see Outside school: Sports, later]. One [10] interviewed 15-16 year olds, and coaches, from community football teams on their perceptions and experiences of this; in general the Olweus criteria were found to be useful, with repetition being one indicator of banter becoming bullying. Another study

[11] looked at how the issue is reported in UK media, examining newspapers and TV reports in elite sport contexts. This can be a sensitive issue for both peer-peer and coach-athlete contexts. The authors contend that 'the media can educate their audiences, and potentially benefit wider society, through identifying where banter can move from being prosocial to inappropriate in nature' (p.11), and that 'the findings may be used as part of education around bullying and banter in school curricula and/or as part of education programmes for athletes, coaches and parents in sport (p.13).

MEASURES

Cyberbullying keeps changing through technological advances and the varying popularity of different social media sites, and an updated coding scheme for 'negative online experiences' is provided in [12]. The authors surveyed 2,500 adolescents aged 14-16 years, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and from 5 countries, including England, about such experiences. They developed a coding scheme for WHAT happened, WHERE did it happen, WHY did it happen, and WHO did it; with 30, 6, 11 and 7 subcategories in each, respectively. Reliability analyses were made and the scheme is available for other researchers.

The way bullying victims think about and explain their experiences plays an important role in how they cope and recover. A study of 1,869 young people in the UK, aged 16-19, looked at their thoughts about bullying before starting university or college [13]. Of these, 1,279 had experienced bullying and completed a survey about their thinking patterns. The results identified four key themes:

1. **Feeling degraded in others' eyes** (e.g., "It is shameful to have been picked on").
2. **Blaming themselves for not moving on** (e.g., "It is my fault that I am not moving on").
3. **Feeling labelled as a victim** (e.g., "People see me as the type of person who gets picked on").
4. **Experiencing social defeat** (e.g., "I have been completely humiliated").

The measure was shown to be reliable and valid. The authors suggested it could be helpful in therapy to identify and track unhelpful thoughts in people who have been bullied.

Bullying-related psychological reactions can be evoked by virtual reality (VR) scenarios, either neutral or hostile. A team of researchers developed such classroom-based scenarios and assessed them with a sample of 67 females aged 11-15 years from Oxford secondary schools [14]. The authors suggest that 'The VR scenario could potentially be used in educational and therapeutic settings to enhance empathy towards victimised children or enhance resilience following victimisation' (Abstract).

THE USE OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

There is a growing effort to involve young people more in designing and conducting research themselves. This theme is pursued in [15]; working in a large UK secondary school, the authors initiated a Participatory Action Research (PAR)[1] study; they began with a broad question: What do students and staff of this school view as the core bullying issue(s) and how do they want to address this? In-depth discussions with the co-researchers and reflections on some questionnaire findings gave further insight into this issue, as well as the complexities of determining bullying/banter (see Definitional

Issues, earlier). This work highlighted two key insights: the role of power dynamics and the concept of time as a non-linear process. The authors emphasised that participatory action research (PAR) underscored the value of the knowledge and perspectives of both students and staff in identifying core bullying issues. Careful attention to recruiting co-researchers, creating feedback loops across the school, and recognising the importance of both local and academic knowledge helped manage the complex power dynamics within the study.

STUDIES ON RELATED FACTORS

The negative outcomes associated with both experiences of victimisation, and of bullying perpetration, are among the most well-established findings from research. Two publications explored aspects of this further. One [16] was a meta-analysis of 16 studies; three of these were from the UK (1 from the Millenium Cohort study; 2 from Scotland). All examined victimisation, self-esteem, and internalising symptoms (anxiety, depression). As expected, these three measures all correlated significantly with each other. However, an important additional finding was that some of the effect of victimisation on internalising symptoms was explained or mediated by lowered self-esteem. The authors

suggest that 'Anti-bullying programmes may consider incorporating self-esteem building exercises in bully-victims' (Abstract).

The second article examined the correlates of different kinds of victimisation experience [17]: the form or type of victimisation; the perceived motive for it; and the relationship with the perpetrator. Analyses were conducted to determine how these aspects were associated with internalising and externalising symptoms in a sample of 2,125 adolescents from the United Kingdom (using Ditch The Label's data); they were differentially associated with internalising and externalising symptoms, but in complex ways. For example, the form of online gaming victimisation was associated with externalising but not internalising symptoms.

"The authors suggest that 'Anti-bullying programmes may consider incorporating self-esteem building exercises in bully-victims'"

[1] A research method that involves the participation of community members in the research process, with the goal of enabling change through collaborative action and reflection.

VICTIMISATION AND DEPRESSION

Victimisation is known to be linked to internalising symptoms, and this was confirmed and extended in a meta-analysis of 31 studies (including one from England) [18]. Overall, the risk of depression in children and adolescents who were bullied was 2.77 times higher than that of those who were not bullied. It was also higher for perpetrators of bullying, where the risk of depression was 1.73 times higher than that in nonbullying individuals; and especially for the bully-victims (involved as both), where the risk of depression was 3.19 times higher than that in nonbullying-bullied individuals.

Some literature has suggested that self-esteem can be a protective factor against this link, but the evidence is mixed. A study of 836 pupils aged 12-14 years from 3 UK secondary schools, threw an interesting light on this [19]. The authors point out that conventional measures of self-esteem often rely on perceptions of others – which they call contingent self-esteem. In contrast, they argue that more relevant here may be what they call authentic self-esteem, which is positive self-evaluations that arise out of past, present and potential future experiences of personal challenges, problems, and difficulties. The findings were that even moderate levels of authentic self-esteem could mitigate the association between being bullied and social anxiety, as well as with disrupted classroom concentration. The authors argue that efforts to monitor and where necessary enhance the authentic self-esteem of young people are warranted.

A study with 5,909 college students from 7 countries (one being England) [20] confirmed the link between childhood bullying victimisation (assessed retrospectively) and current depressive symptoms; but examined 3 other possible mediators for this link: emotion regulation (how you cope with strong emotions), rumination (repetitive thinking about causes, consequences, and symptoms of negative affect and mood states), and distress tolerance (the ability

to persist in goal directed activity when experiencing psychological distress). Emotion regulation strategies were not significantly associated with bullying victimisation and did not mediate its association with depressive symptoms. However, experiencing childhood bullying victimisation was associated with higher reports of adulthood depressive symptoms via aspects of rumination (higher problem-focused thoughts, repetitive thoughts, and anticipatory thoughts), as well as lower distress tolerance. This was found in all countries examined. The authors suggest that 'Rumination and distress tolerance may be promising targets for resilience-promoting interventions among children experiencing peer victimisation' (Abstract).

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SITBS (SELF-INJURIOUS THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOURS)

A most tragic outcome of bullying victimisation can be suicide, often preceded by self-harm and suicidal ideation. A systematic review of the link of childhood bullying victimisation to SITBs was reported [21], based on 35 articles from 17 countries (including 6 from the UK, 5 using the ALSPAC data set). All forms of bullying related to components of SITB, but the strongest associations were between bullying and suicide attempts in older adolescent boys and young men (particularly bully-victims), and bullying and self-harm and suicidal ideation in girls and young women. Gender differences were explored further in [22], using data from the Millenium Cohort study in the UK. At age 14 self-harm prevalence was 15.4% with a ratio of 2.6 females to 1 male. However, bullying others was more strongly associated with self-harm in boys than girls; intense social media use and not confiding in family members was associated with a greater

likelihood of self-harm in girls than boys.

In-person (traditional) and cyberbullying, and both, were compared for links to self-harm in a study of 11-16 year olds from 39 schools in Wales [23]. Altogether 35.0% of pupils reported being bullied, with 18.1%, 6.4% and 10.5% being victims of in-person bullying at school only, cyberbullying only and both in-person bullying at school and cyberbullying respectively; so perhaps surprisingly, being only cyberbullied had a less significant impact on self-harm. Feeling lonely during recent summer holidays was another strong predictor of self-harm. Pupils were twice as likely to self-harm following in-person bullying as their non-victimised peers. The authors add that interventions for young people that minimise the potential impacts of bullying on self-harm should also include strategies to prevent loneliness.

A study of 142 adolescent-parent dyads from the UK suggested the importance of paranoid beliefs in this context [24]. The authors point out that 'Paranoid beliefs are one of the most commonly reported symptoms to co-occur with suicidality in teenagers' (p.1486). Bullying victimisation in adolescence was strongly associated with paranoia.



DEPRIVATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD FACTORS

Both perceived and actual levels of income, and income inequality, have associations with bullying victimisation. The importance of perceived inequality (relative to friends) was shown in a study using the UK Millennium Cohort Study, collected at ages 11 and 14 (N = 12,995) [25]. Perceived income inequality predicted adverse mental health and a range of interpersonal difficulties during adolescence, even when controlling for objective family income. At 11 years, young people who perceived themselves as belonging to poorer families than their friends reported more victimisation.

School-level disadvantage (the proportion of children in the school eligible to receive free school meals) was examined in a study using data from 4,727 children aged 6-11 years, from 57 primary schools across England and Wales [26]. Children in more disadvantaged schools were more likely to report being bully perpetrators, bully-victims, and to engage less in defending behaviors during a bullying incident. Children from more disadvantaged schools who reported bullying others showed fewer emotional symptoms than those from less disadvantaged schools (perhaps as bullying was more commonplace there). The authors suggest 'the need to focus on encouraging defending behaviors within the most disadvantaged schools and reducing the social positioning and status of those who bully. With these changes, it is possible that a more positive school climate would begin to become established' (p.12).

Another study used ALSPAC data for 12-15 year olds to see how mother-reported conduct problems (including bullying) interplay with child-reported neighbourhood risks (such as low social cohesion) [27]. In the deprived neighbourhoods, bullying had the highest interplay with lack of social cohesion and social control, and high deviant peer affiliation. Social cohesion played a protective role.

"At 11 years, young people who perceived themselves as belonging to poorer families than their friends reported more victimisation"

A study [28] using data from the 2014 HBSC survey, covering 38 European countries, examined the impact of traditional and cyberbullying on health outcomes. Although there were significant differences in bullying prevalence across countries, both traditional and cyberbullying were found to play a significant role in poor physical and mental health. The combined effects of both types of bullying had a greater impact on psychological health than on physical health.




SOCIAL GAINS OF BULLYING

While it is well-known that any involvement in bullying leads to negative consequences both in the short and long term, some researchers argue that there may be short-term benefits for those who bully. Bullying perpetrators may engage in this behaviour to gain dominance and perceived popularity in their peer group, even if it makes them less likeable. A meta-analysis of 1,487 samples of 8-20-year-olds (including two from England) supported this view [29]. It found that adolescents with agentic goals (focused on getting ahead) rather than communal goals (focused on getting along) had higher levels of bullying and aggression, which were linked to greater popularity but lower likeability. The authors suggest that intervention programmes could reduce bullying and aggression by helping adolescents pursue their goals in more prosocial, rather than antisocial, ways (p.12).



SIBLING BULLYING

Sibling bullying is known to be a serious issue, with links to school bullying. This was supported by a scoping review of sibling bullying in childhood, drawing on 45 studies, 13 of these coming from the UK [30]. The authors comment on how only two studies investigated potential ways to address sibling bullying. The importance of this was highlighted by a study of sibling bullying in autistic adolescents [31]. Using data from the Millenium Cohort Study, for 416 autistic adolescents aged 11, 14, and 17 years who had at least one sibling, sibling bullying was prevalent, especially in those who were late-diagnosed, had a shared bedroom, and lived in a low-income household. Early adolescent sibling bullying was a significant predictor of reduced self-esteem in mid-adolescence, which in turn, predicted poorer mental health and wellbeing in late adolescence. The authors 'emphasise the immediate need for sibling bullying prevention programmes in families of autistic adolescents as early prevention of sibling bullying is likely to protect the self-esteem, and therefore, the mental health and wellbeing of autistic adolescents' (p.1546).



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GROUPS AT RISK

It is well known that certain groups of students are more at risk of bullying victimisation. Those considered in recent articles are young people in care, those with SEND, children who stutter, LGBTQ+ pupils, and trans/gender diverse groups.

A study in Wales cited earlier [5] compared online experiences of 11-16 year olds in Welsh schools, who were in care or not in care. Those in care were more involved in cyberbullying and problematic social media use, and these were associated with lower wellbeing scores. The authors conclude that young people in care appear to be less involved with online experiences that positively impact wellbeing and more involved in online experiences that negatively impact wellbeing. Promoting positive online experiences and education around problematic social media use may be particularly valuable in helping young people living in care develop healthy, safe and positive online lives.

This need to promote positive online experiences was also brought out in a study of pupils from 94 schools and colleges across England, comparing those with and without SEND [32]. While not focusing on bullying, it was found that adolescents with SEND experienced significantly more social isolation and less parental online safety support. Overall, adolescents with SEND encountered more online relationship risks than their peers without SEND, especially older teens.

Children who stutter can become a target for nasty teasing and bullying, and a study of 35 such children and adolescents in England [33] found a link severity of stuttering to bullying victimisation; and from bullying to anxiety, albeit moderate in size. The authors conclude that 'The association between bullying and anxiety scores indicates the importance of anti-bullying initiatives in promoting psychosocial development in school-age children who stutter' (Abstract). Young people who are LGBTQ+ are known to be at greater risk of bullying victimisation. A systematic review of two decades of

"While not focusing on bullying, it was found that adolescents with SEND experienced significantly more social isolation and less parental online safety support."

research [34] identified risk and protective factors in this regard. The authors identified 111 relevant articles (3 of or including UK participants). These confirmed that sexual and gender minority youth in general were more at risk of being targeted for LGBTQ+ bullying, as were boys/males.. The findings also showed that social support (from peers, families and teachers) and a sense of school belonging acted as protective factors, as did specifically anti-homophobia policies in the school, and gay-straight alliances.

One study compared experiences of trans / gender-diverse (TGD) young people (12-13 years) and their peers using data from a large longitudinal (2 time points; now 13-14 years) cohort in Greater Manchester [35]. At both time points females, TGD young people and those who preferred not to say their gender had lower wellbeing than males not questioning their gender, with the largest effect evident for the TGD group. Bullying at the first time point (ages 12-13) negatively predicted wellbeing at the second time point (one year later).

ATTITUDES AND BYSTANDERS

The way the peer group responds to bullying is an important area of study, often explored through artificial scenarios. One study [36] with children aged 9–11 and adolescents aged 12–14 then 12–14 years from lower/middle-income families in SE England presented an intergroup name-calling scenario involving an ingroup perpetrator and an outgroup victim. The scenario also compared a non-stigmatised context (victim from another school) and a stigmatised context (victim identified as a Traveller child).

Both children and adolescents viewed proactive bystander behaviour more positively than passive bystander behaviour. However, they were more likely to endorse proactive bystander behaviour in the non-stigmatised context; intervening to help a victim from another school was seen as more acceptable than helping a victim from a different ethnic group (Traveller). Participants may have held stereotypes or biases towards the Traveller victim, leading to less support for intervention.

An age trend was observed: adolescents had more favourable views of proactive

bystanding in the stigmatised context, while children preferred it in the non-stigmatised context. This could reflect a developmental shift in recognising that bullying towards a stigmatised group is discriminatory and should be challenged. When pupils endorsed proactive bystander behaviour, they focused on protecting others' welfare and the moral obligation to intervene and prevent harm. In contrast, those who supported passive bystander behaviour cited personal choice, suggesting it was up to the bystander to decide whether to act.

The importance of moral norms in influencing bystander behavior was also found in a survey of 419 UK university students [37]. Here, students were presented with a scenario or vignette about relational bullying (social exclusion). Compared to other variables (such as what others thought, or emotional attitudes), moral norms expressed (e.g. 'I would have a good conscience') were the best predictors of an intention to act in the situation.

OUTSIDE SCHOOL: SPORTS

There has recently been increased interest in bullying in sports, which of course often involves young people. This includes both athlete-athlete bullying, and coach-athlete bullying. Issues around banter in sport were mentioned earlier [10, 11]. A special issue of *Frontiers in Psychology* together with *Frontiers in Sport and Active Living* was devoted to *Safeguarding in Sports*, edited by 5 researchers (2 from UK) [38]. Altogether 17 peer-reviewed articles from scholars from around the world includes original research reports, review articles, and case studies using a range of methods and theoretical approaches; they cover the following four themes: The role of sports culture in athlete maltreatment; Sexual violence and bullying; Injury prevention; and Prevention initiatives; and are available on Open Access.



OUTSIDE SCHOOL: COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

Unfortunately bullying and harassment does not stop after school, and some continuity has been found from school to college and/or university. A report on Violence at University [39] reviews the prevalence of violence (including bullying) on a range of UK university campuses, and how it is perceived by students in. A survey questionnaire was produced, which has potential for use and guidance in the HE sector.

A book edited by two UK researchers [40] has 20 chapters focussing on cyberbullying from a number of countries, much involving campus students.

A scoping review of racism and harassment in UK medical schools [41] found 5 relevant studies; the authors concluded that 'there is a high prevalence rate of discrimination, harassment, and stereotyping being experienced by ethnic minority undergraduate medical students in the UK. There is underreporting due to perceived and structural barriers' [Abstract].

ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

Schools in England are required to anti-bullying strategies laid, for maintained schools these must be in a behaviour or anti-bullying policy, but their quality and coverage varies a lot. A survey of 200 anti-bullying policies from schools across England, used a revised 42-item scoring scheme to examine this [42]. On average, school policies had 61% of these items; compared with 49% in an earlier survey in 2008. There was an increase in policy coverage, notably for mentioning cyber bullying and many types of bias-based bullying; but comparisons were limited by different sampling procedures. Despite good coverage in some areas, fewer than 25% of policies mentioned responsibilities of other school staff, suggested how to help the pupil(s) doing the bullying to change their behaviour, gave advice to parents about bullying, or discussed specific powers to deal with cyberbullying and out-of-school bullying.



INTERVENTIONS

The role of teachers, and how prepared they are to deal with bullying, has come under scrutiny from several studies. A review of this topic [43] argued that bullying, once considered a "rite of passage" among school children, is increasingly recognised as a serious public health issue. If teachers see bullying among students and do nothing, then bullying is likely to increase. The article discusses several factors that influence what teachers do: teachers' ability to recognise bullying, judgments about how serious a bullying incident is, normative beliefs about bullying, the gender and popularity of the students involved, the teacher's own self-efficacy, empathy, and stress levels, and the support of school leadership.

This review reinforces the need for teacher training, sensitive to these issues, and that need is taken up in a review focussing particularly on cyberbullying [44] and the need for extensive training to assist teachers and therapists to work with cyberbullying victims. A UK-based review [45] similarly argues that 'teachers are unprepared to address the issue due to a lack of training and confidence in identifying cyberbullying and insufficient knowledge of how to implement effective intervention strategies' [p.158]. Another review focussed on how school nurses can help prevent bullying [46]; the authors reviewed 2 studies, two from the UK, covering activities such as psychoeducation, empathy training, counselling, and self-management.

While teachers have a key role in implementing school anti-bullying policies, and working through the curriculum, one view is that 'some, perhaps many, students are not receptive to the anti-bullying efforts and initiatives delivered by teachers and other adults' [47, p.2]. The CATZ or Cross-age Teaching Zone intervention aims to utilise slightly older pupils to work with younger ones [47, 48]. In this approach, small co-operative groups of older students (tutors) are shown by adult facilitators how to develop and deliver a lesson on anti-bullying themes to younger schoolmates (tutees).

"Teachers are unprepared to address the issue due to a lack of training and confidence in identifying cyberbullying and insufficient knowledge of how to implement effective intervention strategies"

One study with 3 Junior schools and 2 High schools in the UK, focussed on the 'social validity' of the intervention, namely the degree to which pupils and teachers regarded the intervention as acceptable and useful [47]. A pre-post experimental design with 9–15-year-olds found that, participants expressed moderately positive views of the CATZ anti-bullying intervention, and these became significantly stronger following direct experience of it. Those pupils who experienced it, expressed a greater willingness to engage in it in the future. A second report was of three studies, carried out with 11-year-olds in 5 junior high schools in the UK [48]; pupil tutors were invited in small groups to incorporate information supporting positive beliefs (concerning non-physical forms of bullying, the value of disclosing being bullied to adults, and helping victims) into a lesson they devised for themselves and to deliver that to small groups of 9-year-olds. Self-reports of beliefs were collected from the CATZ tutors and age-matched controls prior to and following the intervention. Significant positive effects were found for promoting beliefs that non-physical forms of bullying are unacceptable, disclosing bullying to adults and getting the right kind of help have value and importance, and victims can be assisted in safe ways. These findings support the use of CATZ to foster positive anti-bullying beliefs, although direct behavioural effects remain to be examined.

There are now many school-based interventions aiming to reduce bullying, and related phenomena, which have shown modest success. These include the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (developed in

Norway), KiVa (developed in Finland), NoTrap! (developed in Italy), as well as INCLUSIVE (in the UK) (see Focus on Bullying 2021, 2022).

The KiVa team has been trying out KiVa in some UK schools, and a report [49] outlines the adaptation of two KiVa lessons into KiVa-SEND lessons and their implementation in two special schools in the UK. One school supports pupils with a primary need of Autism, the other supports pupils with severe and complex learning disabilities. Engagement with the lessons was high from both pupils and staff; the content was perceived as acceptable by staff, complementing the curriculum and perceived as suitable for their pupils. The authors conclude that further development of the KiVa-SEND programme in special schools is now warranted.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance developed its earlier All Together programme [1] into a newer version called United Against Bullying, funded by the Department for Education in England

[50]. The overall aim is to establish United Against Bullying Schools that have evidenced their work to reduce bullying and improve the wellbeing of all pupils. The programme has a particular focus on those children who are at risk, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs (SEND), pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM), and other groups at risk of experiencing bullying. Preliminary evaluation shows that UAB is well received by participating schools, with CPD training evaluated very positively. According to school audit reports, fully meeting a range of relevant criteria improved over the year, sometimes quite dramatically. Pupil self-reports show that levels of being bullied, and ever bullying others, showed modest decreases. For many pupils school experience improved, and for most pupils wellbeing scores improved. Although SEND and FSM pupils generally had higher levels of bullying involvement, they also tended to show higher levels of improvement over time.



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