



BULLYING IN SCHOOLS THE STATE OF COMPREHENSION AND EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION

Annotation:

During the school years, bullying is one of the most common expressions of violence in the peer context. Research on bullying begun more than forty years ago, when the phenomenon was commented as ‘aggressive, intentional acts carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily protect him- or herself’. Three criteria are relevant in order to define aggressive behaviour as bullying: (1) repetition, (2) intentionality and (3) an imbalance of power. Given these characteristics, bullying is often defined as systematic abuse of power by peers. It is regarded globally as a complex and serious problem.

Keywords:

Bullying, Violence in school, Children, Adolscentsantibullying intervation.

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Introduction

Violence has been acknowledged as a relevant and serious problem by several international agencies. In 1996, the World Health Assembly assumed a resolution declaring violence a leading worldwide public health problem (WHA 49.25) and called upon Member States to give urgent consideration to the problem of violence. In the school context, peer bullying is the most common form of violence among children and youths. Bullying deals children’s rights, including the right to education as requested by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (The United Nations 1989). It presents special risks for vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities; refugees, or children accomplished by migration; children who are eliminated; children who are owned by a minority group, or simply children that differ from the peer group.¹

What is bullying?

Research on bullying begun more than 40 years ago and this behaviour as ‘aggressive, intentional acts carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily protect him or herself’. Despite some discuss over the definition, most researchers concur that bullying involves the intent to harm and an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim, and it takes place repeatedly. Bullying involves a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim. The bully increases in power, and the victim loses power. As a result, it is difficult for the victim to respond or to cope with the problem. Imbalance of power can be derived from physical strength, social status in the group, or from group size (e.g. a group targeting a single person). Power

¹ Being bullied at school: the case of high-achieving boys. Source: Springer Science and Business Media LLC



may also be achieved through knowing a person's vulnerabilities (e.g. appearance, learning problem, family situation, personal characteristics) and using this knowledge to harm him or her.²

Bullying comprises verbal attacks (e.g. name calling, threats), physical behaviours (e.g. hitting, kicking, damaging victim's property), and relational/social aggression (e.g. social exclusion, rumour spread) up to the most recent forms of attacks through Internet and new technologies (also referred to as cyberbullying).

Prevalence

There is a wide variation in prevalence rates of bullying across studies, partially due to differences in measurement and/or operationalisation of the bullying construct. Such inconsistencies have strongly influenced rate estimation, and scholars have called for greater consensus in definition and measurement.

In a recent review, Juvonen and Graham report that approximately 20–25% of youth are directly involved in bullying as perpetrators, victims, or both. Large-scale studies conducted in Western countries suggest that 4–9% of youths frequently engage in bullying behaviours and that 9–25% of school-age children are bullied. A smaller subgroup of youth who both bully and are bullied (bully/victims) has also been identified. In a recent meta-analysis on bullying and cyberbullying prevalence across contexts, with an overall sample of 335,519 youth (12–18 years), the authors estimated a mean prevalence of 35% for traditional bullying (both perpetration and victimisation roles) and 15% for cyberbullying involvement.³

Age and gender differences

Several studies suggest that the prevalence and forms of bullying are different across age groups, even though the findings are not straightforward. In a meta-analysis of 153 studies, Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim and Sadek found that the effect size of age was 0.09 on bully role, 0.01 on bully/victim role; and –0.01 on victim role, indicating an overall stability of victim and bully-victim roles over time and a slight increase of bullying behaviour with age. Bullying peaks during middle school years (i.e. 12–15 years), and tends to decrease by the end of high school. With respect to the forms of bullying, with increasing age there appears to be a shift from physical bullying to indirect and relational bullying.

Some theoretical considers view bullies as individuals who require social skills, have a low self-esteem, deficiencies in social information processing, low social standing in the peer group, and other adjustment problems. Others view bullying as functional, adaptive behaviour associated with benefits. Empirical studies have not always succeeded in refining this issue, partly due to the failure to accept the heterogeneity of children and adolescents involve bullying.

The amount of research on antibullying interventions is significant, with numerous scientifically evaluated school-based programmes. In their meta-analysis, Farrington and Ttofi concluded that such programmes are often effective, reaching an average decrease of 20–23% for bullying others and of 17–20% for being bullied. However, the effects vary considerably across programmes; they are also weaker when programmes are evaluated with more stringent designs, such as randomised controlled trials. It should be noted that some programmes do not lead to positive outcomes, some have never been evaluated, and some have been evaluated so poorly that no conclusions can be drawn regarding their effects. Evans and colleagues reported that up to 45% of the studies showed no programme effects on bullying perpetration and about 30% showed no programme effects on victimisation. Which

² Bullying Intervention in Schools: A Multilevel Analysis of Teachers' Success in Handling Bullying From the Students' Perspective. Source: SAGE Publications

³ Social-cognitive and behavioral attributes of aggressive victims of bullying. Source: Elsevier BV



programmes work best, or what are the effective ingredients of these programmes, are urgent questions.

Conclusion:

In summary, whole-school programmes to prevent bullying are often successful. Their effects vary, however; some programmes show consistent positive effects whereas others have little or no evidence of effectiveness. What explains the divergent effects? Programmes should be intensive and long-lasting, and they should be implemented with fidelity. Involving parents seems to strengthen the effects, as well as the use of disciplinary practices with bullies. Raising awareness among students about the role of the whole group has an impact on maintaining bullying, and enhancing antibullying norms and responses within classrooms is crucial. It is also highly important that teachers clearly communicate their antibullying attitudes to students.

References

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