

Bullying in Schools: International Variations

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Bullying behavior, an old phenomenon, has been a recent research interest of educators over the past ten years (Olweus, 1994; Ross, 1996). Though school children have been victimizing each other in schools as described in early literary works, systematic research on the topic began in the 1970s and was confined to Scandinavian countries (Olweus, 1994). However, within the past two decades, more countries (e.g., Japan, U.K., Canada, US) began studying bullying behaviors in schools. Notably, this interest has been sparked by a prevalence of violence in schools throughout the world.

Bullying among school-age children occurs worldwide (Anonymous, 2003). It occurs in all schools at all grade levels, although most frequently at the elementary level (Sampson, 2002). Bullying behavior can be defined as repeated emotional, verbal, and/or physical attacks against other students who are vulnerable and cannot properly defend themselves because of size, strength, or being outnumbered (Sampson, 2002). Olweus (1994) has defined bullying as a “negative action on the part of one or more students” that is repeated over time (Olweus, 1994, p. 1173). Bullying implies an imbalance of power that usually occurs without provocation. Along with physical and verbal abuse, it can also include intimidation, rumor spreading, theft, tripping, destruction of others’ property, sexual harassment, hazing, and ostracizing because of sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity (Sampson, 2002). Bullying can be an aggression that is direct (i.e., face-to-face confrontation) or an indirect aggression (via a third party and typically of a verbal nature) (Rivers and Smith, 1994).

The literature suggests that school bullying occurs throughout the world. This article will review a series of studies conducted by researchers in various countries to address the following factors: (a) prevalence and characteristics of bullied children, (b) prevalence and characteristics of bullies (c) where bullying occurs, (d) attitudes toward bullies, and (e) disclosure of bullying victimization. Recommendations and strategies for prevention of bullying will be discussed.

The Victims of Bullies

Studies conducted in various countries

revealed that 8 - 38 % of students are bullied (Limber et al., 1998; Glover and Cartwright with Gleeson 1998 in Sampson, 2002). Some (8 - 20 %) are bullied on a regular basis—once a week or more (Farrington, 1993; Ortega and Lera, 2000; Rigby and Slee, 1999; Salmivalli, 1991). Olweus (1994) studied 140,000 Norwegian children between the ages of 8 and 16 and found approximately 15% of them being bullied. In Denmark, little systematic research on bullying has been conducted. One significant study published in Denmark, revealed that in comparison to 24 other countries, Denmark scored high (top three) on bullying behaviors and in the top half for students who reported being bullied (Dueholm, 1999).

Whitney and Smith (1993) sampled 6,758 students in 24 schools in all areas of the city of Sheffield, U.K. The ages of the students ranged from 8 – 16 years. These researchers modified Olweus’ (1991) bullying questionnaire and also administered a school information questionnaire to the head teachers. Their results revealed 27% of the elementary and middle school sample reported being bullied sometimes during the term the study was conducted. Ten percent indicated it happened at least once a week, although less frequently at the secondary level; 10% and 4% respectively. No differences were found between the frequency of being bullied by boys and girls.

Rivers and Smith (1994) surveyed 7000 elementary and secondary school students also in the U.K. They were interested in knowing whether age and sex differences significantly affected different types of bullying. They found in the elementary grades, 29% of boys and 24% of girls experienced some form of physical bullying; approximately 41% of boys and 39% of girls experienced verbal bullying; and almost 19% of boys and 25% of girls experienced indirect bullying. On the secondary level, approximately 12% of boys and 5% of girls reported physical bullying; 23% of boys and 24% of girls, verbal bullying, and 8% of boys and 10% of girls indirect bullying. As might be expected, overall girls reported more indirect and verbal types of bullying than physical, although no significant differences were found between the sexes on verbal bullying behaviors.

Another U.K. study conducted in Yorkshire used Olweus' questionnaire to survey 296 students in three urban middle schools. In this study, approximately 20% reported having been bullied, with the younger children being bullied more frequently. More boys indicated being bullied than girls (Boulton and Underwood, 1992).

In the U.K., bullying of children from races other than white, those of different sexual orientation, and those with disabilities is a serious problem (Thompson, Whitney, and Smith, 1994). Non-white students more than white students of the same age and gender were victims of racial harassment and name calling (Moran, Smith, Thompson, and Whitney, 1993). Rivers (1995) surveyed 140 gay and lesbian students; eighty percent of them reported being bullied either physically or verbally by others in schools.

In Dublin, Ireland, Olweus's self-report questionnaire was administered in four schools to 783 students between the ages 7 and 13. Ten percent admitted to being involved in bullying behavior as either bullies or victims (O'Moore and Hillery, 1989). In Sweden, around 15% of second and third graders (about 8 and 9 year olds) reported being bullied now or then, or more frequently (Boulton and Underwood, 1992). One Italian study conducted in Rome by Baldry and Farrington (1999) of 113 girls and 125 boys between the ages of 11 - 14 years found that approximately half of them had been bullied. Girls were victimized more than boys (34% compared to 25%). Boys withstood more direct bullying, whereas girls indirect.

Bullying is also a prevalent problem in Canada. Forty nine percent of students sampled in a study conducted in Toronto reported having been bullied at least once or twice during the term in which they were enrolled (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). The highest percentage of students who admitted they were bullied were in the 5th and 6th grades. Similar to bullying rates in the U.K., 8% of the Canadian students indicated being bullied on a regular basis, often once per week, or more often. Furthermore, a survey during the 2001 school year of more than 225,000 Ontario students revealed that between one fourth and one third of them were involved in some form of bullying either as target or as a perpetrator. In Japan, 15% of primary school pupils say that they have bullied. In Australia and Spain, the problem prevails among 17% of their students (Anonymous, 2003).

Fewer studies on the prevalence of bullying behaviors have been conducted in the U.S., although the available data indicates it is quite common in American schools (Limber, Flerx, Nation, and Melton, 1998). Olweus (1984, as cited in Fried, 1997) reported that in American schools, approximately 2.1 million of students are bullies and 2.7 million are victims. The National Association of School Psychologists (cited in Anonymous, 2003) reported that every day more than 160,000 American school children miss school because they fear being bullied. Furthermore, targets of bullying may stop talking about school, get to school late each day, miss classes, or make up excuses to miss school entirely.

In one study conducted in the Midwest of middle and high school students, 88% of them reported having observed bullying, and 77% had been victims themselves (Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver, 1991). Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler's (1995) study of school children in Midwestern, USA revealed that 76.8% of the sampled population had been bullied, and 14% of those children indicated that they experienced severe reactions to the abuse. Limber et al. (1998) asserted that of 6,500 fourth through sixth graders in the rural south, 1 in 4 had been bullied regularly, and 1 in 10 had been bullied at least once a week. Bullied children tend to be picked on by other children, and the way in which they respond may influence the continuance of victimizing behavior (Sharp, 1996). These children tend to be fearful, anxious, and have slightly lower self-esteem than non-bullied children (Olweus, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1991). They tend to be loners, quiet, cautious, sensitive, and easily prone to crying (Olweus, 1994). Generally these victims have few friends in school and tend to withdraw and isolate themselves from others. These characteristics appear to apply to both boys and girls, although less research on girl victims has been conducted.

Olweus (1994) has differentiated between the "passive or submissive victim" and the "provocative victim" (p. 1179). The provocative victim can be aggressive, hyperactive, and their behaviors aggravating to other students. The passive victims usually become moody, irritable, frustrated, or withdrawn. However, any of them may become aggressive with those at home or with peers and friends. They also may exhibit behavior that Hodges and Perry (1999) summarized as "internalizing behavior"—they cry easily, are

manifestly anxious, are socially withdrawn, and tend to submit to their attackers' demands. Internalizing tendencies, Hodges and Perry further maintained, almost certainly interfere with children's abilities to defend and assist themselves effectively during attacks against them; second, victimized children tend to be physically weak, a factor that reinforces bullies' behavior; and thirdly, some victimized children display externalizing problems, such as disruptiveness, ineffectual aggression, dis-honesty, and argumentativeness.

Students with disabilities may be at significant risk for bullying victimization. In Dublin, O'Moore and Hillery (1989) studied 783 pupils in four schools and found that in comparison to mainstream students, students with disabilities reported more often that they had experienced acts of bullying. When considering acts of bullying as occurring at least once a week or more, 12 per cent of students with disabilities reported being bullied, as compared to 7 per cent of mainstream students.

Many students with special educational needs tend to have less confidence in forming friendships, and often times, because of their social inability to relate well with others their age, are easily made anxious and prefer to avoid social situations altogether (Whitney, Smith, and Thompson, 1994). Those who find themselves in integrated classrooms are often victims of bullying because they exhibit characteristics that demonstrate this lack of social confidence. For example in the U.K., Martlew and Hodson (1991) used interviews and observations to analyze the relationship that students with disabilities have with mainstream peers when they are integrated into one class. The researchers concluded that students with disabilities developed fewer friendships and were teased on a more frequent basis than mainstream students. Overall, the mainstream students preferred to interact and socialize with their mainstream peers rather than with students with disabilities.

In a study by Nabuzoka and Smith (1993) the social relationships of children in two primary schools in the U.K. were analyzed to view which characteristics the students associated with bullies, and which of those they associated with victims. Through interviews of 179 students, both mainstream students and those with special educational needs, it was determined that the students with disabilities were more often

described as behaving with victim tendencies than the mainstream students. The results of this study also revealed that 33% of the students with disabilities were thought to be victims of bullying, compared to only 8% of mainstream students.

There is evidence that race and ethnicity may be a factor in bullying behavior. Asian children have been reported to be at higher risks of bullying than others (Moran, Smith, Thompson, and Whitney, 1993). Canadian students (43% of the Toronto sample) reported that they had been bullied because of their race (Charach et al., 1995). Ethnic minority children were found to be at risk for bullying in addition to children who were "different" (i.e., low socioeconomic status, wearing glasses, being overweight, wearing different clothing) (Espelage and Asiado, 2001).

The Bullies: Prevalence and Characteristics

Who are the bullies? Baldry and Farrington (1999) found that boys were more likely to be bullied by older children than girls and by students in the same year but in another class. Neither boys nor girls tended to be bullied by younger children. Approximately 18% of girls and 20% of boys indicated being bullied by both girls and boys. The first study of this nature conducted in 10 schools with 1,200 eight to twelve year old students in Madrid, Spain showed that 17% of these children identified themselves as bullies; the same number reported being bullied (Vieira da Fonseca, Fernandez Garcia, and Quevedo Perez, 1989). Several years later, Ortega (1992), using a Spanish translation of Olweus (1989) questionnaire, and working in cooperation with Smith at the University of Sheffield, surveyed five schools in southern Spain. They sampled 859 children ranging in ages from 11 to 16. Their findings parallel those of Olweus (1989) and Whitney and Smith (1993). Twenty-five percent of the students surveyed reported having bullied their peers on a regular basis. Boys were more aggressive and more involved in bullying behaviors than girls.

Ortega and Smith (2000) hypothesized that children in schools in low socioeconomic areas would have a higher incidence of bullying, and they developed a questionnaire to survey these populations. The results revealed that 33% of students from low socioeconomic areas bullied others occasionally. Limber et al. (1998) reported that of rural South fourth through sixth graders

in the U.S., 20% of them disclosed they had bullied other children regularly. In addition, Pellegrini, Bartrini, and Brooks' (1999) study of 5th grade students in a rural county of Northeast Georgia that utilized a sample of early adolescents found that 14% were bullies.

In Whitney's and Smith's sample (1993) bullying was reported more frequently to have been performed by only one boy; bullying by more than one boy was the next highest response, followed by both boys and girls, and several girls. Bullying by a sole girl had the lowest response rate. This was consistent for both the middle and secondary schools. In addition, their sample demonstrated that in the middle schools, bullying behaviors were most prevalent toward students in the same class as the victim; however, in the secondary schools, bullying was most prevalent toward those in different classes from the bullies.

Bullies tend to be more aggressive, stronger, and bigger than their peers and represent about 7 – 15% of sampled school-age populations. More frequently they are boys than girls (Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, Bartini and Brooks, 1999). Bullies are aggressive toward their peers and also adults (Olweus, 1994). They also tend to be aggressive in many of their relationships, are impulsive, and become easily angered (Olweus, 1993; Weir, 2001). Even though they engage in bullying and aggressive behaviors, bullies report no difficulty forming friendships, have minimal anxiety, and tend to have high self-esteem (Nansel, et al. 2001; Olweus, 1993; Weir, 2001).

They have a strong need for power, dominance, and being in control of others. Early childrearing practices suggest that bullies come from homes characterized by a lack of warmth, nurturance, and involvement on the part of the parents (Fried and Fried, 1996). In addition, aggressive behavior is permitted and often role-modeled by parents. In school settings, the values of bullies' are often at odds with the majority of students (Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks, 1999). Bullies' continued affiliation with their aggressive peers, for many of them, results in school failure and eventually dropping out of school (Coie and Dodge, 1998).

Where Bullying Occurs

Bullying occurs most frequently on school grounds rather than as often believed, to and from school (Sampson, 2002). Olweus (1991) found no

significant difference in occurrence between rural and urban schools in his Norwegian sample. Nor did he find any differences in school size or class size; however, there were differences in the schools where bullying occurs. Presumably school climate, school policies, and the supervision of students contributed to the frequency of bullying problems in any given school.

Whitney and Smith (1993) found that in The U.K. the majority of the bullying occurred on the playground, especially among elementary and middle school students. At the secondary level, it also occurred on the playground as well as in classrooms and school corridors. Sometimes bullying happens in the restrooms. Some students reported being bullied coming to and from school, but not bullied as frequently as in the schools.

Attitudes Toward and of Bullies

The majority of Australian children in Rigby and Slee's (1991) study reported they were opposed to bullying and were supportive of those being victimized. Girls tended to be more supportive because of their inherent empathic nature both in recognizing the emotion someone else is feeling and in feeling the same emotion themselves. In addition, it is also claimed that females are generally more empathic than males towards victims of aggression (Rigby and Slee, 1991). However, a study by Menesini et al. (1997) revealed that in regards to intervening, there is no dispute that boys tend to disrupt acts of bullying more than girls do. The willingness to interrupt a dispute is contributed to boys having a greater desire to be in control; whereas girls fear the likelihood of being harmed in the midst of trying to stop an altercation. It has been found that acts of bullying often involve one or more boys, and the bullies themselves tend to be stronger than their peers, which contributes to a female's fear of intervening.

Bullies tend to relate well with others who exhibit bullying tendencies, and are less sympathetic to the emotions of victims (Menesini et al., 1997). If a bully were to witness a situation in which another bully was interacting in a hostile manner with a victim, the second bully would be more likely to join in if the victim was someone that they did not like. Slaby and Guerra (1988) have found that bullies believe that victims do not suffer, and any aggression or hostility that

they receive is rightly deserved. Bullies tend not to take into consideration the emotions of their victims and are unaware of the significant impact that their behavior can have. It is often the case that delinquent boys believe that the best approach to increasing their self-esteem and avoiding a negative image can be achieved by directing aggression towards others. Bullying is a selfish act in which the bully benefits from the aggressive behavior without realization of the impact it has on victims. Half of the students surveyed in one English sample seem not to understand why bullying occurs and are upset that it does, whereas the remaining half seem to understand why some students are bullied (Whitney and Smith, 1993).

Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) reported that the attitudes of youngsters being victimized (aggressive victims and non-aggressive victims) were different from those doing the bullying. As expected, the bullied had negative attitudes toward bullying. Similarly, Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001), in their Greek sample of 1312 students between 8 and 12 years of age, found that bullies and victims disagreed on their attitudes toward bullying and bullies. Victims had negative attitudes toward bullying, feeling it was a very unpleasant experience and reporting that they did not want to associate with bullies. One third of the Greek sample that identified themselves as bullies, reported that they understood the reason for students being bullied. Females were found to be more empathic than males and becoming more upset about bullying incidents than boys.

Disclosure of Bullying Behaviors

Bullying is often a secretive activity that takes place away from the view of teachers and other adults (Mooney, Creaser, and Blatchford, 1991). Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to determine the extent of disclosure by victims and observers of bullying behaviors. Victims often do not report bullying either because of fear of retaliation or embarrassment at being able to cope with the victimization. Further, peers often perceive tattling as negative. Bullied children sometimes believe that telling an adult will be ineffectual. One reason why more cases of bullying are not reported is that victims of bullying are convinced that if they report the problem, it would only get worse. Thus to some extent, many young people, fearing being bullied, spend their school years in a permanent

state of anxiety and insecurity (Anonymous, 2003).

Of those who do report bullying, both middle and secondary school students in Sheffield, England are more likely to tell parents or significant others in the home rather than a teacher or a school administrator (Whitney and Smith, 1993). Middle school students are more likely to tell either a teacher or someone at home. The students who do tell are those who have more frequently been bullied, especially those who have been victimized several times a week. However, disclosure is not typical behavior, as only half of those bullied report telling anyone about the incident.

Recommendations and Strategies for Prevention of Bullying in Schools

Clearly, strategies and programs to reduce incidences of bullying in schools must start early in the elementary grades. Children in the elementary grades are more empathic toward bullying behaviors and may be more prone to respond to interventions of a preventative nature (Rigby and Slee, 1991). In addition, younger children have a higher rate of reporting bullying behaviors (Rigby and Slee, 1991). Educating students about bullying increases awareness of the seriousness of these acts. Parents are particularly concerned as more and more of their children are being victimized, and in some cases seriously hurt or killed by bullies. In some recent instances reported by the media, those who took the lives of classmates, were victims of bullying who responded in a fatal manner (Baker and Gerler, 2004).

Teachers must also be educated on identifying bullying behavior and instructed on ways they can reduce and deal with this behavior when it occurs in their classrooms. Students must feel that their teachers can be trusted and have the authority to intervene when bullying incidents occur.

A peer facilitation model that uses peer helpers to resolve conflicts is one strategy that can be used. First, peers must be taught basic communication skills that involve active listening and the use of reflection statements to express empathy and understanding. Teaching students conflict resolution and problem solving skills can help them to resolve disputes without resorting to violence, using derogatory remarks, or other forms of verbal abuse. The Peace Education

Foundation (PEF) has a set of curricular materials that can be implemented to educate students, teachers, and parents on the dynamics of conflict, how to deal with conflict nonviolently, and to promote peacemaking skills in homes, schools, and communities throughout the world (PEF, 2004). For more specific information visit the website at <http://www.peace-ed.org>.

Teachers and school administrators must foster positive multicultural environments where respect and tolerance for everyone are encouraged and role modeled (Moran, Smith, Thompson, and Whitney, 1993). One program developed and field tested by Olweus (1994) in Norwegian schools had significant reductions in direct and indirect bullying behaviors. This program approached the problem by developing school policies that consisted of monitoring students' activities in and out of school. Rules were developed against bullying, and school psychologists and counselors counseled bullies and their parents. Parents and teachers were also educated and consulted within groups. Better supervision by adults of school facilities was instituted. In addition, there is a great need for counselors and other service providers in the schools to advocate for violence prevention strategies that include parental involvement and on-going parenting skills training. This training must be aimed at educating parents on the importance of keeping handguns and other dangerous weapons out of the hands of children, curtailing children's exposure to media violence, addressing the effect of racism and sexism on violent behavior, and emphasizing the value of teaching and using conflict resolution skills in daily life (Fried, 1997).

In addition, schools and parents should teach children how to be more assertive and to behave constructively when faced with a threat (Sharp, 1996). Teaching assertiveness skills and self-defense strategies can help foster self-esteem and self-confidence in students. One intervention conducted in Sheffield, England consisted of group meetings with students wherein they were taught how to make assertive statements, remain calm in stressful situations, how to respond to teasing and name calling, and to deescalate physical threats (Sharp and Cowie, 1994).

Generally, bullying can be managed in the schools if the seven strategies under the acronym "SCRAPES" provided by Fried and Fried (1996, cited in Fried, 1997) are faithfully followed. These are: S- Self-esteem and social skills enrichment;

C- Conflict resolution and mediation skills; R- Respect for differences, de-prejudicing exercises; A- Anger management and assertiveness training; P- Problem solving skills; E- Empathy training; and S- Sexual awareness training.

Finally, increasing public awareness about the problem can help to reduce incidents of bullying in schools. Olweus (1991) has asserted that a combination of strategies can lead to the 50% reduction in the number of bullied victims in schools. These strategies should include:

(a) active involvement by teachers and parents in prevention programs, (b) vigilance by school personnel for incidents of bullying, (c) the development of firm sanctions and consequences for students who engage in bullying, and (d) teaching assertiveness skills to the bullied victims (McFadden, 1986; Olweus, 1991).

CONCLUSION

This paper summarizes the available literature in the field of bullying and draws on cross-cultural studies. Bullying appears to be a problem that is prevalent in most cultures and throughout the world. In general, girls appear to be victims more often than boys and children who are "different" in some way from peers are also targeted for victimization. Clearly, all countries need to make an effort to implement prevention and intervention programs to ensure the safety of their students.

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KEYWORDS Bully; school bullying; peer victimization

ABSTRACT Although bullying has long been in existence among children, it has only begun to be systematically evaluated in the past ten years. Olweus, a pioneer in the field of bullying research, examined the topic among Scandinavian children. Now research is being conducted in many cultures and countries and the results are surprisingly similar. This study sought to examine the literature across cultures with regard to the prevalence of bullying, the characteristics of both the victim and the bully, and the disclosure by children of bullying behavior. Finally, successful prevention efforts will be discussed.

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