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Bullying: Research into Practice

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Why should EPs be concerned about bullying research?

- Young people and parents perceive bullying as a serious problem.
- It happens at all stages and probably in all schools.
- It can be associated with underachievement, truancy, depression, and in extreme cases, suicide.
- There may be adverse long-term outcomes for both victims and perpetrators.
- Pupils with ASNs in mainstream may be particularly vulnerable.
- Schools should be safe for children.
- Research indicates that intervention can reduce levels of bullying in a school.
“We say a child is being bullied, or picked on when another child, or a group of children, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the child being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a child is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two children of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.”

(Whitney & Smith, 1993:7)

Issues:
• Imbalance of power: bullying versus peer aggression…
• Repeated versus ‘one-off’ incidents…
• Intent: actual or perceived…
Prevalence:
- Bullied ‘this term’
  - Self-report: 6%-28% victim; 3-17% bully
  - Peer nomination: 7-19% victim; 8-18% bully
- Prevalence decreases as pupils get older, with peak at around 11 years
- More long-term (> 6 months duration) in secondary schools
- As many as 85% of pupils may experience bullying at some point in their school lives
- 4-5% of those involved are bully-victims
The Nature & Scale of the Problem

Where does it take place:
- Mostly in the playground in primary school, but also in corridors and in classrooms in secondaries

Who gets bullied:
- Boys report being bullied more than girls
- Boys are mainly bullied by other boys and girls are bullied by girls and also by boys
- Children who are anxious, insecure, lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem
- Children with physical difficulties, unusual names or accents
- Children with ASNs in mainstream schools
- Children from ethnic minorities or other countries
- Children new to the school
- Many victims of bullying are ‘passive’ (anxious, insecure, unable to defend themselves).
- Other can actually be ‘provocative’ (create the tension, hot-tempered and fight back)
Long-Term Impact

For Victims:
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Suicidal ideation
- Problems in peer relationships
- Problems persist beyond the duration of bullying, even into adulthood
- Severity of outcomes linked to frequency of victimisation

For Bullies:
- *Intragenerational* continuity:
  - male bullies at 14 also bullies at 32
- *Intergenerational* continuity:
  - male bullies have children who go on to be bullies
- More likely to have court appearances
Types of bullying

- Physical
  - Direct aggression, hitting, kicking etc.

- Relational
  - Exclusion from relationships and activities

- Verbal
  - Malicious teasing, name-calling, rumour spreading etc.
Challenges for Intervention

- Can’t solve the problems by ‘treating’ the victim
- Bullying is not a simple relationship between a bully and a victim
- It is a complex social process involving the whole peer group in distinctive roles
- Approaches to intervention have to reflect this complexity
- Schools vary in the extent to which they can/will commit themselves to tackling the problems
Issues

Issues:
• Links with peer rejection
• While some bullies may have good ‘Theory of Mind’, they may lack empathy and may rely upon aggressive behaviours rather than upon non-aggressive alternatives
• To what extent do ‘Bullies create victims and victims create bullies’?
Transactional Coping Paradigm

Person Variables

Situation Variables
Transactional Coping Paradigm

Person Variables  

Situation Variables  

Appraisals
Transactional Coping Paradigm

Person Variables

\[ \rightarrow \]

Situation Variables

\[ \rightarrow \]

Appraisals

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Coping Strategy Use
Transactional Coping Paradigm

Person Variables → Appraisals → Coping Strategy Use

Situation Variables

Emotional Reaction
Two studies (Hunter & Boyle 2004; Hunter, 2004) with a total of 1,289 pupils from stages P5, P6, S2, S3.

All pupils completed self-report measures on:
→ peer-aggression/ bullying
→ coping strategy use
→ control, challenge and threat appraisals
→ emotions
Results

Study 1.

- More frequent aggression = more avoidance and ‘wishful thinking’
- Control – “no” reported using sig. more Wishful Thinking than “yes”
- Threat – unrelated to coping strategy use
- Challenge – less Problem Focused coping used when no positive outcomes are perceived; more Social Support used when unsure of possibility of positive outcomes
Results

Study 2.
• Structural equation model tested:
Results

Study 2. Appraisals and emotions
• Threat significantly negatively correlated with both control and challenge.
• Control reduces levels of both negative emotions.
• Threat increases levels of both negative emotions.
• Challenge increases levels of offence/loss, unrelated to fear.
Results

Study 2. Coping strategies

• Control positively related to assertive strategies (e.g. standing up to bullies) but also to aggressive strategies (e.g. hitting bullies). Negatively related to avoiding bullies and bottling up feelings.

• Threat positively related to aggressive strategies, crying (among girls) and truanting.

• Challenge positively related to standing up to bullies, telling bullies how they feel, staying away from bullies, distracting self, and ignoring bullies.

• Emotions positively related to telling, threatening to tell, wishful thinking, and crying. Negatively related to standing up to bullies.
Implications

Solution Focused Brief Therapy

- Increasingly used to deal with bullying situations
- Findings support utility of the method, but suggest two modifications:
  1. Tackle victims’ threat perceptions
  2. Teach victims emotion regulation techniques i.e. how to cope with distress, anxiety and negative feelings
The participant role approach

“Bullying is collective in nature, based on social relationships in the group” (Lagerspetz et al, 1982)

• Peers present in over 80% of bullying episodes
• Peers as reinforcers, assistants, outsiders and defenders
• Time spent by peers during bullying:
  – Join in - 21%
  – Intervene - 25%
  – Passively watch - 54%
• Preadolescent cliques and relational bullying
The intervention context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High levels of bullying and slagging, general concern over ethos</td>
<td>Review of social supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion over definitions and processes</td>
<td>Action group set up to re-write policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concern over reporting to teachers</td>
<td>Awareness raising and staff development</td>
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<td>Good pupil support systems</td>
<td>New PSE anti-bullying programme with concurrent drama sessions</td>
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Example of findings

- No response given
- Asked the person to stop
- Did nothing
- Told a Come and Talk pupil
- Told a friend
- Told a teacher (not my guidance teacher)
- Told someone in my family
- Was nasty back

Percentage of respondents what bullied pupils did vs what non-bullied pupils would do.
Development of a PSE programme

- McLean 1994
- O’Connell, Pepler and Craig 1999
- Salmivalli 1999, and 2001

Aims:
To raise awareness
To equip pupils to deal with bullying and peer pressure
To impact upon pupil culture
The PSE programme

S1, S2 and S3 pupils
Pre (n=300) and post (n=199) evaluation
4 lessons covering:

1. Awareness raising of bullying in their school
2. Teaching on group influences
3. Role of the peer group in bullying
4. Assertiveness training
Results

- Confidence to intervene raised
- Confidence to tell someone to stop significantly raised for S1
- Teaching on group influences appeared to be appreciated
- Opinion on responsibility of the bystanders did not appear to have changed
- Follow-up required to look at impact on behaviour

- Now a framework for 6 lessons for S1-S4
Mean Confidence to stop a bullying situation

- **S1**: 7.0
- **S2**: 6.5
- **S3**: 6.0

**Time of Evaluation**
- Pre intervention
- Post intervention

**Year**

- S1
- S2
- S3
General conclusions

• Need to address pupils’ emotions when they ask for social support
• Partial support for SFBT
• Assertiveness training, related to bullying, may change appraisal of the situation
• Older pupils may benefit from peer-support
• Psychology in the classroom
• More research needed, to look at behaviour change and how to raise sense of responsibility