
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLYING VICTIMS IN SCHOOLS

National Centre for Social Research

Background

This study represents the first in-depth investigation of pupil characteristics and school characteristics in relation to bullying of secondary school pupils aged 14 to 16 in England. This summary presents the topline findings from the full report which is due to be published in January 2010.

Dataset and Methods

To explore the characteristics of bullying victims, the study uses information from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). The LSYPE dataset contains information on the young person's individual and family characteristics. The data have also been linked to the National Pupil Database (NPD), which contains information about pupils' attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, and also provides information on school-level factors such as the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the school. The dataset was analysed using multiple logistic regression, which explores individual predictors of bullying while adjusting for other individual, family and school characteristics. All regression models were run in a multilevel framework.

All the findings presented in this research brief are statistically significant at the level of 5%. This means that the relationships found would only be expected to occur by chance less than 5% of the time, and is the generally accepted threshold for reliable scientific results.

Key Findings

Prevalence of bullying

- The reporting of bullying was much more prevalent in the younger age groups. Almost half of young people reported being bullied at age 14 (47 per cent) and this proportion decreased with age to 41 per cent at age 15 and 29 per cent by the age of 16.
- As with overall bullying, the prevalence of being a victim of each different type of bullying also decreased with age. The most common type of bullying at all ages was name calling and cyberbullying, followed by being threatened with violence, being socially excluded and being subjected to actual violence. The least common type of bullying was found to be being forced to hand over money or possessions, which was much less common than all other types of bullying reported at all ages.

Characteristics of victims

- After controlling for all the predictors, the risk factors for being bullied in general that were consistently high at each age group were having a special educational need, having a caring responsibility, having a disability or having spent a period of time in social services care.
- Young people with a disability were more likely than those without a disability to be called names or be excluded from friendship groups at all ages.
- Overall, girls were more likely than boys to be bullied at age 14 and 15, although gender was no longer an important predictor for overall bullying at age 16.

- Name calling was a much more common type of bullying between girls than between boys as was being excluded from friendship groups.
- Boys were much more likely than girls to have their money or possessions taken, to be threatened by violence or to be a victim of actual violence.
- White young people were significantly more likely to report being bullied overall than ethnic minorities.

Telling your parents

- Where parents had reported that their child was being bullied (in addition to the young person themselves reporting being bullied) it was more likely that the young person then stopped being bullied. Young people whose parents had reported them being bullied when they were 14 were almost twice as likely not to report being bullied at age 16 compared to those whose parents had not reported them being bullied.

Attainment

- Young people who had been bullied at the ages of 14 or 15 had a significantly lower Key Stage 4 score than those who hadn't been bullied. On average, young people who had been bullied had a Key Stage 4 score 13 points lower than those who hadn't been bullied. This is the equivalent of 2 GCSE grades.

Main activity at age 16

- Young people who had been bullied were less likely to be in full time school at age 16 than those who hadn't been bullied. They were more likely to be in full time work, particularly in the case of those who had been threatened by violence or been a victim of violence.
- Young people who had been bullied were more likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET) than those who had not been bullied.

Additional Information

Further information about this research can be obtained from Tammy Campbell, Schools Analysis and Research Division, 3 FL, DCSF, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

Email: tammy.campbell@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.