



THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF BULLYING IN SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND

Key Findings

YEAR 6 PUPILS

- ◆ 57% of the Year 6 pupils surveyed, stated that they had not been bullied during the past couple of months. 26% said that they had been bullied only once or twice and 17% responded that they had been bullied two or three times a month or more often during the past couple of months.
- ◆ 78% of Year 6 respondents said that they had not taken part in bullying other pupils during the past couple of months. 17% said that they had been involved in bullying other pupils only once or twice and 5% stated that they had been involved in bullying other pupils two or three times a month or more frequently.
- ◆ Being 'called mean names, made fun of or teased in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying experienced by both boys and girls in Year 6.

- ◆ Year 6 girls recorded a tendency to be excluded more often than boys, while Year 6 boys tended to be the victims of physical bullying more often than girls. Both boys and girls tended to be bullied by pupils in their own class.

YEAR 9 PUPILS

- ◆ 71% of the Year 9 pupils surveyed, said that they had not been bullied during the past couple of months. 21% reported that they had been bullied only once or twice and 8% stated that they had been bullied two or three times a month or more often during the past couple of months.
- ◆ 78% of Year 9 respondents said that they had not taken part in bullying other pupils during the past couple of months. 19% stated that they had been involved in bullying other pupils only once or twice and 3% reported that they had been involved in bullying other pupils two or three times a month or more frequently.
- ◆ Being 'called mean names, made fun of or teased in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying experienced by both boys and girls in Year 9.
- ◆ Year 9 girls recorded a tendency to be excluded more often than boys. Year 9 boys tended to be the victims of physical bullying more often than girls. Both boys and girls tended to be bullied by pupils in their own class.

INTRODUCTION

1. Bullying, both in schools and in the workplace, has received much recent publicity and it has become a key issue for schools and public policy over recent decades in terms of concerns from educational providers, parents and, not least, from pupils themselves. Awareness of issues around bullying will also contribute significantly to schools and colleges effectively discharging their responsibilities under national and local policy. The results of this research provide evidence-based recommendations to facilitate policy-makers and practitioners in devising and developing further anti-bullying approaches so that bullies and victims are not excluded from normative educational and developmental experiences.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

2. The aim of the study was to identify the nature and extent of bullying in primary and post-primary schools in order to reduce marginalisation of bullies and victims. The findings are compared with those in a previous research study 'Bullying in Schools: A Northern Ireland Study' published by the Department of Education in October 2002 in order to identify any changes or trends, which the Department should consider in any future policy. This study differs from the previous study in that it concentrates on the nature and extent of bullying in schools from the pupils' perspective with particular reference to bullying behaviour ascribed to a pupil's age, gender, religion, ethnicity and disability.

MAIN FINDINGS

Year 6 Pupils

3. Of the 993 Year 6 pupils surveyed, 56.7% stated that they had not been bullied during the past couple of months, 26.2% said that it had only happened once or twice and 17.1% responded that they had been bullied 'two or three times a month' or more often during the 'past couple of months'.
4. Being 'called mean names, made fun of or teased in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying experienced by both boys and girls in Year 6.

Overall, the second most frequently reported behaviour was bullying 'with mean names, comments or rude gestures' and the third most common type of bullying was 'Other pupils told lies or spread false rumours about me and tried to make others dislike me'.

5. Year 6 girls recorded a tendency to be excluded more often than boys, while Year 6 boys tended to be the victims of physical bullying more often than girls. Both boys and girls tended to be bullied by pupils in their own class.
6. 23.9% of Year 6 pupils reported that they were subjected to bullying that lasted 'one or two weeks', 9.6% were subjected to bullying lasting 'about a month' and 3.8% of pupils were subjected to bullying that lasted 'about six months'. The frequencies increase to 4.7% of Year 6 pupils enduring bullying for 'about a year' and 4.8% for 'several years'.
7. 45.2% of Year 6 pupils reported that they had been bullied in the 'playground or athletic field'. 'In the classroom (with teacher absent)' was the second most common location (21.0% of pupils); followed by the 'lunch room' (18.7% of pupils).
8. The majority of Year 6 pupils (75%) who recorded that they had been victims of bullying stated that they have told someone of their experience.
9. 77.9% of Year 6 respondents said that they had not taken part in bullying other pupils during the past couple of months, 17.1% said that they had been involved in bullying other pupils 'only ... once or twice' and 5.0% of Year 6 pupils stated that they had been involved in bullying other pupils 'two or three times a month' or more frequently. Year 6 boys tended to record their involvement in bullying other pupils more frequently than girls.
10. Calling other pupils 'mean names, making fun or teasing him or her in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying carried out by Year 6 pupils followed by keeping 'him or her out of things on purpose' and bullying other pupils with 'mean names comments or rude gestures'.
11. Of those Year 6 pupils who admitted taking part in bullying others, 69.6% said that their teachers had spoken with them regarding their bullying

behaviour. 56.2% of the same group said that an adult at home had talked with them about their bullying other pupils.

12. The majority of Year 6 pupils felt that teachers or other adults at school tried to put a stop to it when a pupil was being bullied. Most pupils felt that their teachers had done 'a good deal' (30.1%) or 'much' (30.9%) to stop bullying.
13. Year 6 pupils tended to express a pro-victim attitude with 76.9% of respondents stating that when they see a pupil their age being bullied at school they feel sorry and want to help the victim.
14. In relation to issues concerning equality, 46.4% of Year 6 pupils thought that a pupil's race or skin colour could make them 'more likely' to be bullied; while 44.1% of pupils felt that it 'doesn't make a difference'. When thinking about pupils with a disability, 44.1% felt that a pupil's disability could make them 'more likely' to be bullied and 34.7% thought that a disability 'doesn't make a difference'. Regarding pupils' religion, 48.3% of participants thought that a pupil's religion 'doesn't make a difference' and 33.0% of Year 6 felt that it could make them 'more likely' to be bullied.

Year 9 Pupils

15. Of the 1,319 Year 9 pupils surveyed, 71.2% said that they had not been bullied during the past couple of months, 21.1% responded that it had only happened once or twice and 7.7% stated that they had been bullied 'two or three times a month' or more often during the 'past couple of months'.
16. Being 'called mean names, made fun of or teased in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying experienced by both boys and girls in Year 9. The second most frequently reported behaviour was 'Other pupils told lies or spread false rumours about me and tried to make others dislike me' and the third most common type of bullying recorded by Year 9 pupils was 'Other pupils left me out of things on purpose, left me out from their group of friends or completely ignored me'.
17. Year 9 girls recorded a tendency to be excluded more often than boys. Year 9 girls also tended to report that 'Other pupils told lies or spread rumours about me and tried to make others dislike me' more often than boys. Year 9 boys tended to be the victims of physical bullying more often

than girls. Boys tended to record that they had been 'bullied with mean names or comments about my race or colour' more often than girls. Boys also reported a tendency to be 'bullied with mean names or comments' regarding both ability and disability more frequently than girls. Girls tended to report that they had been 'bullied with the use of mobile phones' more often than boys. Both boys and girls tended to be bullied by pupils in their own class.

18. 18.0% of Year 9 pupils stated that they were subjected to bullying that lasted 'one or two weeks', 6.2% were subjected to bullying lasting 'about a month', 2.5% of pupils were subjected to bullying that lasted 'about six months', 3.0% of Year 9 pupils reported that they had endured bullying for 'about a year' and 1.1% for 'several years'.
19. 38.0% of pupils who had reported being bullied said that they had been bullied in the 'hallways/stairwell'. In the 'playground or athletic field' was the second most common location (35.8% of bullied pupils); followed by 'in the classroom (with teacher absent)' (35.2% of bullied pupils).
20. The majority of Year 9 pupils (69%) who recorded that they had been victims of bullying stated that they have told someone of their experience.
21. 78.1% of Year 9 respondents said that they had not taken part in bullying other pupils during the past couple of months, 19.1% stated that they had been involved in bullying other pupils 'only ... once or twice' and 2.8% of Year 9 pupils reported that they had been involved in bullying other pupils 'two or three times a month' or more frequently.
22. Calling other pupils 'mean names, making fun or teasing him or her in a hurtful way' was the most common type of bullying carried out by Year 9 pupils followed by keeping 'him or her out of things on purpose, excluding him or her from my group of friends or completely ignoring him or her' and 'I hit, kicked, pushed and shoved him or her around or locked him or her indoors'.
23. Of those pupils who had taken part in bullying others, 58.6% reported that their teachers had spoken with them regarding their bullying behaviour. 33.4% of the same group recorded that an adult at home had talked with them about their bullying other pupils.

24. The majority of Year 9 pupils indicated that they felt that teachers or other adults at school tried to put a stop to it when a pupil was being bullied. Most pupils felt that their teachers had done 'a good deal' (31.7%) or 'much' (23.3%) to stop bullying.
25. Overall, Year 9 pupils tended to express a pro-victim attitude with 63.8% of respondents stating that when they witness a bullying incident at school they feel sorry and want to help the victim.
26. 61.1% of Year 9 pupils felt that a pupil's race or skin colour could make them 'more likely' to be bullied, while 34.0% of pupils thought that it 'doesn't make a difference'.
27. 49.9% thought that a pupil's disability could make them 'more likely' to be bullied.
28. 53.3% of participants thought that a pupil's religion could make them 'more likely' to be bullied; while 36.7% felt that it 'doesn't make a difference'.

Comparison with Previous Study

29. Overall the findings are similar to the findings of the 2002 report.
30. In the 2002 report, 40% of Year 6 pupils indicated that they were bullied at school in the last couple of months to some degree. 26% of pupils experienced bullying 'once or twice in the last couple of months', 6% 'two or three times a month', 5% 'about once a week' and 4% 'several times a week'. Similar prevalence rates have been recorded in this current study: 43.3% of Year 6 pupils indicated that they had been bullied to some degree 'In the past couple of months'. 26.2% said that it had only happened 'once or twice', 7.9% responded that they had been bullied 'two or three times a month' 4.3% said 'about once a week' and 4.9% stated that they had been bullied 'several times a week' during the 'past couple of months'.
31. In the 2002 report, 30% of Year 9 pupils indicated that they were bullied at school in the last couple of months to some degree. 20% of pupils experienced bullying 'once or twice in the last couple of months', 3% 'two or three times a month', 3% 'about once a week' and 4% 'several times a week'. Similar prevalence rates have been recorded in this current study:

28.8% of Year 9 pupils indicated that they had been bullied to some degree 'In the past couple of months'. 21.1% said that it had only happened 'once or twice', 2.6% responded that they had been bullied 'two or three times a month' 2.3% said 'about once a week' and 2.7% stated that they had been bullied 'several times a week' during the 'past couple of months'.

CONCLUSIONS

32. Bullying behaviour in schools is, generally, carried out by a minority of children. The children who are experiencing the most persistent bullying over time are a relatively small group. Nevertheless exposure to any bullying behaviour can have serious consequences for children and their mental and physical health can be adversely affected on a long-term basis.
33. It is, therefore, important that bullying, at all levels is deemed to be unacceptable by schools and appropriate steps are taken to deal with all incidences that are identified by staff or pupils. There is a high probability that bullies will progress to anti-social activities on leaving school and it is important that bullies are identified at an early stage of their career in bullying.
34. There is a gender aspect to bullying insofar as bullying by boys often entails a physical component while bullying by girls tends to be relational. It should be noted that these are tendencies and boys are also involved in relational bullying while there are instances of physical bullying by girls. Since it is less difficult to identify physical bullying there is a concern that relational bullying may not, always, be perceived by staff. Peer organisation and affiliation can be contributory factors in respect of relational bullying and research has suggested that attention should be paid to the formation of peer groups in order to ensure that such groups do not become a focus for bullying.
35. Society in the North of Ireland is becoming more diverse both in terms of ethnicity and the full participation of persons with disabilities. The research has raised concerns about bullying on the grounds of disability, religion and ethnicity and has highlighted the need to change attitudes.
36. The views expressed by the children in the study suggest that prejudicial treatment of members of ethnic groups and persons with disabilities is

confined to a minority of children. It is important, however, that children who either participate or collude in bullying of this nature recognise that the rights of all children have to be respected.

37. Overall the findings are similar to the findings of the 2002 report suggesting that there are still challenges facing schools in relation to developing an anti-bullying culture and preventing bullying and protecting children who have been affected.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislation and Policies

38. The legislation should be reviewed to determine whether the issues of 'Child Protection' and 'Bullying Prevention' need to be more closely aligned. In particular, attention should be paid to the need for protection for victims of bullying as well as the need for prevention of bullying. Consideration should be given to the classification of bullying as a form of 'significant harm' in line with regulations and guidance associated with pastoral care.
39. Schools have policies in place as required by the Department of Education. Given the level of bullying, however, it is timely to review existing policies in order to determine whether Section 75 issues have been adequately addressed and whether policies have been effective in practice. This will entail both an examination of the content of policies and the modes of dissemination throughout the school and the ways in which such policies have been communicated to non-teaching staff and parents/guardians.

Monitoring

40. Consideration should be given to the monitoring of incidents of bullying that involve members of ethnic groups and pupils with disabilities.
41. Bullying through name calling with sexual meaning should be monitored as such bullying poses a threat to the healthy growth and development of children and their exploration of their sexual nature and sexual identity.

42. Parents of pupils from ethnic backgrounds should be consulted regarding the experiences of their children and should be able to provide an input into school policies and practices.
43. Parents of pupils with disabilities should be consulted regarding the experiences of their children and should be able to provide an input into school policies and practices.
44. The issue of religion based bullying should be considered both in terms of Protestant/Catholic bullying and also in relation to the potential for religion based bullying to be connected to ethnic bullying.
45. The issue of name calling should be closely monitored by schools to determine if homophobic bullying has been taking place and, if this is the case, action should be taken to ensure that children are protected.
46. For both boys and girls the bullying hotspots were the playground and the classroom without the teacher present. The hallways/stairwells also ranked highly with Year 9 pupils (highest with girls and 2nd highest with boys). The monitoring of these areas will require an understanding of the key role played by name calling. This suggests that CCTV coverage of particular zones might not be productive as bullying through name calling would be difficult to detect. This study has found that bullying occurs in virtually all aspects of school community life - in the classroom, in the playground and on the school bus.
47. There needs to be a greater understanding of the difference between direct bullying through physical threat or action and relational bullying. The latter form of bullying is more likely to go undetected.

Peer Organisation

48. Peer group attachments have the potential to become sources of bullying and attention should be paid to issues of inclusion and exclusion concerning the formation of peer groups.
49. In line with the above recommendation, children who appear to be without friends should be given support as they are vulnerable to bullying. This should apply, in particular, to children at the start of their school career as

some children may be vulnerable and may risk being bullied from the beginning of their time at school.

50. Careful attention should be paid to bullying which entails name calling with a sexual meaning.
51. Pupils should receive training in ways to identify bullying and support victims and report to teachers where appropriate since the evidence suggests that many pupils are willing to assist victims.

Gender Specific Bullying

52. Girls and boys may bully in the same way. Boys, however, are more likely to be bullies and to be involved in physical bullying which is easier to identify while girls are more likely to bully in ways which are more difficult to detect. Schools should be aware of these differences and the possibility that bullying by girls is under-reported.

In-Service Training

53. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should be offered to teachers to enable them to deal effectively with both direct and relational bullying. Such CPD should include training on early identification of bullies, bully-victims and victims and methods of preventing bullying and protecting victims.
54. Teachers require education in the monitoring and identification of friendship groups in classes to ensure that all children can feel themselves to be included and safe within the school and on the journey to and from the school. There are good practices within schools and these should be studied as possible models for assisting integration of children into the school.
55. Non-teaching staff should be afforded appropriate education and training to facilitate them to identify instances of bullying and ensure that they can liaise effectively with teachers and managers to address bullying problems.

Initial Teacher Education

56. Initial teacher education should sensitise trainee teachers to the issue of bullying and require that they study examples of good practice in schools.
57. Teachers should be supported through induction and early professional development to effectively utilise more positive behavioural strategies in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

58. A quantitative approach was adopted for this large-scale project involving 2,312 pupils from 60 primary schools and 60 post-primary schools across the North of Ireland. The scale of the study reflects the intention to achieve a representative research study. A widely used standardised survey instrument - The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, was employed to permit comparisons with other local and international studies. The research team constructed additional questions relevant to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, relating to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group within the North of Ireland. These questions were added to the standard instrument with Professor Olweus' permission.
59. A stratified sampling procedure, based on social disadvantage, school management type and geographic location was used to select 60 primary schools and 60 post-primary schools from the Department of Education's databases. The analysis was then managed as separate interrogations of two independent data sets: one containing responses from the Year 6, primary school pupils and the second comprising responses from the Year 9, post-primary pupils who took part in the study.
60. Trained researchers administered the questionnaire face to face with each Year 6 and Year 9 class selected for the study. All researchers had been vetted in line with Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (POCVA) requirements. The researchers adhered to an administrative procedure based on Olweus' (2001) 'Instructions for Administering the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire for Students'. This consistency ensured high return rates, confidentiality and uniformity of procedure. In addition, the

presence of a trained researcher ensures that pupils, who may experience emotional problems during the administration, could be referred to the relevant source of support.

61. Positive consent was sought from parents for their child's participation in the study prior to the commencement of data collection. In line with good practice on promoting and respecting children's rights, the children themselves, as participants, were also given choice concerning their involvement. The children were also clearly informed about the purpose of the study and how the findings of the research would be used.

THE PROJECT

62. The Project was undertaken for the Department of Education by the Lifelong Learning Research Centre, School of Education, University of Ulster. The cost of the project was £76,231.

FULL REPORT

63. The full report entitled "The Nature and Extent of Bullying in schools in the North of Ireland" by Dr Gillian Livesey, Professor Gerard McAleavy, Dr Tony Donegan, Joe Duffy, Celia O'Hagan, Gary Adamson and Ruth White, is available on the Department of Education website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg.htm

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

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