BULLYING IN SCHOOL: SOME FACTS, SOME MYTHS, AND SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTION

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GENERAL DEFINITION OF SCHOOL BULLYING

Intentional, repeated negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behavior by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself (who feels vulnerable, more or less helpless).

Three key criteria:

• intentional harm-doing
• usually some degree of repetition
• an imbalance of actual or perceived power implied

The bullying usually occurs without apparent provocation on the part of the student exposed – a form of proactive aggression.
MAIN FORMS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR

- DIRECT PHYSICAL BULLYING
- DIRECT VERBAL BULLYING
- INDIRECT/RELATIONAL BULLYING
- CYBER/DIGITAL BULLYING
PERCENTAGE BULLIED STUDENTS  
(n=10 800)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>9,9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4,6</td>
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Grades 4 - 7 (Boys + Girls) = 15,2%  
Grades 8-10 (Boys + Girls) = 8,0%

OLWEUS GROUP  
AGAINST BULLYING
PERCENTAGE BULLYING STUDENTS (N= 10 800)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
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<tr>
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<td>11,4</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>10,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades 4-7 (Boys + Girls)= 5,8%  Grades 8-10 (Boys + Girls)= 7,4%
Percentage of Students Being Involved in Bullying as Victims only, Bullies only or Bully-Victims

41 Nation Study of 11, 13 & 15-Year-Old School Children (Craig et al., 2009)
THE BULLYING CIRCLE:
Students’ modes of reaction/roles in an acute bullying situation

A. The bully/bullies
   - Start the bullying and take an active part

B. Follower Henchman
   - Take an active part but do not start the bullying

C. Supporter, passive bully/bullies
   - Support the bullying but do not take an active part

D. Passive supporter, possible bully
   - Like the bullying but do not display open support

E. Disengaged onlooker
   - Watch what happens; "is none of my business"; don't take a stand

F. Possible defender
   - Dislike the bullying and think they ought to help (but don't do it)

G. Defender of the victim
   - Dislike the bullying and help or try to help

Y. The one who is exposed, the victim
VICTIMS ONLY

USUALLY HAVE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

• are cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy
• are anxious, insecure, unhappy, and have low self-esteem
• are depressed and engage in suicidal ideation much more often than their peers
• often do not have a single good friend and may relate better to adults than to peers
• if they are boys, they are often physically weaker than their peers
Average Odds Ratio (OR) Unadjusted=2.06 (CI: 1.79-2.38)
Adjusted= 1.74 (CI: 1.54-1.97)

BULLIES ONLY

USUALLY HAVE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

• strong needs to dominate and subdue other students and to get their own way
• are impulsive and easily angered
• show little empathy toward students who are victimised
• are often defiant and aggressive toward adults, including parents and teachers
• are often involved in other antisocial or rule-breaking activities such as vandalism, delinquency, and drug use
• if they are boys, they are often physically stronger than boys in general and the victims in particular

In contrast to what is commonly believed, they do not have special problems with their self-esteem.
The predictive efficiency of school bullying versus later offending: A systematic/meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies.

Average Odds Ratio (OR) Unadjusted = 2.50 (CI: 2.03-3.08)
Adjusted: 1.82 (CI: 1.55-2.13)

BULLY-VICTIMS

HAVE CHARACTERISTICS OF BOTH VICTIMS ONLY AND BULLIES ONLY

- are anxious, insecure, unhappy, depressed and have low self-esteem
- may be hot-headed and oppositional and try to aggress back but not very effectively
- are often involved in other antisocial and rulebreaking activities but to a somewhat lesser degree than bullies only
- may be hyperactive, restless, and have concentration problems (ADHD) and are perceived as generally tension-creating
- disliked by peers (and often teachers) and socially isolated
THREE STATEMENTS/COMMON OPINIONS ABOUT CYBER BULLYING FOR WHICH THERE IS LITTLE OR NO RESEARCH SUPPORT

Based on four large-scale cohorts of US students: A total of more that 440 000 students surveyed in the period from 2007 to 2010.

1. Opinion: *That cyber bullying is a very common, high-frequent form of bullying* --

   Reality: Cyber bullying is a low-frequent from of bullying, only a third or a fourth of the level of “traditional” forms of bullying such as Verbal bullying. See Figure.

2. Opinion: *That cyber bullying has increased dramatically in recent years* --

   Reality: There has been no systematic increase in cyber bullying in the period from 2007 to 2010. See Figure.
THREE STATEMENTS/COMMON OPINIONS ABOUT CYBER BULLYING FOR WHICH THERE IS LITTLE OR NO RESEARCH SUPPORT (Cont’d)

3. Opinion: *That the new media create many new victims and new bullies*

   Reality: Most students – 85-90 percent – who are cyber bullied or cyber bully other students are bullied or bully others in “traditional” ways. There appears thus to be few new victims or bullies and most cases of cyber bullying appears to originate in the school setting.

Time series data for 2007-2010 for (direct)verbal bullying (being bullied) and cyber bullying (being bullied) n= 440,000 US students.
EFFECTS OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM (OBPP)

The first evaluation of the effects of the Olweus BP Program was based on data from approximately 2500 students in 42 primary and junior high schools (grades 5-8) in Bergen, Norway, followed over a period of 2 years (1983-85).

- **MARKED REDUCTIONS - BY SOME 50 PERCENT – IN BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS FOR THE PERIOD STUDIED, MEASURED AFTER 8 AND 20 MONTHS OF INTERVENTION**

- **CLEAR REDUCTIONS IN ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR SUCH AS VANDALISM, THEFT, DRUNKENNESS, AND TRUANCY**

- **MARKED IMPROVEMENT IN VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL CLIMATE OF THE CLASSROOMS**

- Oct01: 15.2%
- May02: 14.0%
- Oct02: 13.2%
- May03: 12.9%
- Oct03: 13.1%

Base data: After 8 months with the Olweus Program

- Oct01: 9.2%
- May02: 10.3%
- Oct02: 9.2%
- May03: 8.7%
Elementary grades (4-7).

Baseline data
After 8 months with the Olweus Program

Oct01  May02  Oct02  May03  Oct03
5,7  5,9  5,1  5,0  4,8
3,6  3,1  2,6

Oct01  May02  Oct02  May03  Oct03
5,7  5,9  5,1  5,0  4,8
3,6  3,1  2,6
Percentage bullied students 2001–2006
14 Oslo schools, grades 4-7 (n=2500)
OVERVIEW OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM (i)

GENERAL PREREQUISITES

• AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT ON THE PART OF ADULTS

MEASURES AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

• QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY
• SCHOOL CONFERENCE DAY
• EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION DURING RECESS AND LUNCH TIMES
• STAFF DISCUSSION GROUPS
• FORMATION OF COORDINATING GROUP
OVERVIEW OF THE OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM (ii)

MEASURES AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

• CLASSROOM RULES AGAINST BULLYING
• CLASSROOM MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS
• MEETINGS WITH PARENTS OF THE CLASS

MEASURES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

• SERIOUS TALKS WITH BULLIES AND VICTIMS
• SERIOUS TALKS WITH PARENTS OF INVOLVED STUDENTS
• DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION PLANS
Based on a limited set of principles. Important to create a social environment characterised by:

- warmth and positive involvement from adults
- firm limits on unacceptable behavior
- consistent application of non-punitive, non-physical sanctions on rule violations
- adults act as authorities and positive role models

Measures based on these principles applied at school, class, and individual levels, and ideally, at home.
RECENT META-ANALYSIS OF ALL ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS IN THE WORLD


- 59 reports/studies
- 30 programs (actually 24)
- one control and one intervention condition
- minimum 200 subjects

Main results:
- positive overall effect but relatively small (OR 1.30-1.40) and very considerable heterogeneity (not a meaningful population of programs)
- 6-7 programs “clearly effective” according to T.& F.

Comment: Too general conclusion, “apples-and-oranges”. All evaluations of all programs except one were based on “efficacy” or “first-time, demonstration” projects; little evidence from “effectiveness” or large-scale dissemination projects; importance of replications - reproducibility
FACTORS OF KEY IMPORTANCE FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

- Awareness
  - Involvement
  - Knowledge of research-based countermeasures
    - Competence enhancing activities
    - Effective implementation
      - Positive results

Olweus Group Against Bullying
BASIC MESSAGE:

Bullying among children and youth is a serious problem in most (Western?) countries but by no means an intractable problem. With knowledge and research-based counter-efforts, it is possible to considerably reduce bullying among children and youth and thereby prevent and eliminate much personal suffering and make society save large amounts of money.
• A few selected citations:

