

# BULLYING: DECONSTRUCTING “WHY” AND ANALYZING THE RESEARCH

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## Agenda

- Defining bullying (types)
- Gender differences
- Depression and Suicide
- Cyberbullying
- Impact on physical health
- Bullying and academic achievement
- Bullycide?
- How do we/you help (interventions)?

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## Quote

- “...it is clear that far too many of our youth are victims of bullying at school, a place they are required by law to attend”  
- Hymel & Swearer

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## What is Bullying?

- Bullying is a specific type of aggression in which
  - *The behavior is intended to harm or disturb*
  - *The behavior occurs repeatedly over time*
  - *There is an imbalance of power, w/ a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one*
- Types of bullying
  - Physical
    - *Hitting*
  - Verbal
    - *Name-calling*
    - *Threats*
  - Psychological
    - *Rumors, shunning/exclusion*
- Nansel et. al

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## Additional Types

- Bullying takes on many forms:
- Direct physical harm
  - Physical bullying
  - *Verbal taunts and threats*
  - Verbal bullying
  - *Exclusion, humiliation, and rumor-spreading*
  - Relational or social bullying
  - *Electronic harassment using texts, e-mails, or online mediums*
  - Cyberbullying
- Hymel & Swearer

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## Detailed Definition

- Bullying has been defined as a subcategory of interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power, with abuse of power being a primary distinction between bullying and other forms of aggression
  - *Smith & Morita; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall*

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### Who is impacted?

- Occurs similarly in both sexes, although some research says more in boys
- How is it portrayed in males and females?
  - *Males*
    - Threats
    - Physical harm
    - Rejection
    - Name-calling
  - *Females*
    - Name-calling
    - Teasing
    - Rumors
    - Rejection
    - Taking of personal belongings
- Nansel et. al

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### Suicide and Murder

- School bullying increased dramatically in the late 1990's owing in large part to the tragic deaths of our youth by suicide or murder.
  - *Marr & Fields*
- "Hurting people hurt people"
  - *Campinha-Bacote, 2002*

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### Where and How does Bullying Impact?

- Occurs more frequently in middle school than high school
- Youth who are bullied are more likely avoided by other youth for fear of being bullied themselves or losing social status among their peers
- **Increased parental involvement is related to a lower level of independence among bullied youth, potentially making them more vulnerable to being bullied.**
- Nansel et. al,

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## Depression and Suicide

- Youth who are identified as victims have higher levels of suicidality
  - Also coined "bullycide"
- Both victims and perpetrators are at higher risk for depression
- Highest levels of depression, either male or female were those who were identified as a bully-victim.
- Psychological Autopsy?

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## Stability of Victimization

- "Peer victimization is often characterized as a rather stable experience (e.g., 'once a victim, always a victim')."
  - 43% of 10 - 13-year-olds continued to be seen by peers as victims 3-years later
- Hymel & Swearer, 2015

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## Cyberbullying

- Although physical and cyberbullying are often the greatest of concern, social and verbal bullying are the more common forms experience by students (Vaillancourt & Trinh, et al.)
  - 31% of 4<sup>th</sup> grade - 12<sup>th</sup> grade students reported by physically bullied by peers
  - 12% reported being cyberbullied
  - 51% verbally bullied
  - 37% socially bullied

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## Rejected vs. Neglected (EPPP)

- Rejected Withdrawn:
  - high social anxiety, submissive, negative expectations of how others will treat them, victim of bullies
- Rejected Aggressive:
  - hostile, hyperactive, impulsive, difficulty regulating negative emotions, no empathy
- Neglected:
  - few interactions with peers, rarely engage in disruptive behaviors, being alone is desirable, don't report being lonely or unhappy.
- Outcome is worse for kids who are rejected by peers. They express loneliness and peer dissatisfaction and are less likely to experience improvement in peer status when they change social groups.

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## Do Teachers Matter?

- "Positive relationships between teachers, and student may enhance the likelihood of student reporting"
  - Oliver & Candappa
- "Teacher support may be especially important when parental support is lacking"
  - Conners-Burrow et al.,
- "Bullying occurs primarily in the peer group, especially in places with little adult supervision"
  - Vaillancourt, Brittain, et. al.,

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## Impact on Academic Achievement (early childhood)

- Peer victimization in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades has been tied to lower academic achievement a year later
  - Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin
- In intermediate years, the impact of sustained victimization shows up in poor academic performance (e.g., grade point average, teacher reports, nation tests), challenges in school adjustment (e.g., not following rules), negative views about school climate (lack of teacher support, and heightened perceptions of being at risk at school)
  - Esben & Carson; Juvonen, Wang & Espinoza; Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton; Rothan, Head, Klineberg, & Stansfeld.

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### Impact on Academic Achievement (high school)

- In high school, students who were victimized reported lower school attendance after two years
  - *Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan*
- High school girls who perceive themselves to be socially marginalized get on a path of poor academic progress and then become less likely to attend college
  - *Crosnoe*

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### Physical Impact of Bullying

- Heightened risk of headaches experienced by children and early adolescents up to 7-years later
  - *Meta analysis from three longitudinal studies by Gini Pozzoli, Lenzi, and Vieno*
- There is evidence that people relive and re-experience social pain (humiliation) more easily than physical pain (injury) and the emotions they feel are more intense and painful than those tied to physical pain
  - *Chen, Williams, Fitness, & Newton*

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### Physical Impact of Bullying (continued)

- Neuroimaging studies show that physical pain is often short lived whereas social pain, for some, seems to last a lifetime (sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me...is not supported in the literature)
  - *Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougal*

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## Health Risks

- Victimization in elementary school predicts heavy smoking for late adolescent men
  - Niemela et al.,

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## Mental Health Risks

- Among adolescents, increased risk of psychotic experiences, particularly paranoia
  - De Loore et al.,
- Boys victimized in middle childhood were at greater risk for psychiatric hospitalization years late
  - Sourander et al.,

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## Aggression and Bullying

- *Maladaptive*
  - Endanger others and are themselves at risk for a host of serious adjustment problems
    - Dodge, Coie, & Lynam,
- *Adaptive*
  - Aggression is successful in changing other's behavior and can be used to acquire resources and maintain group boundaries
    - Rodkin & Wilson,

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### My Perception is my Reality

- Negative life events and one's cognitions about those events contribute to the development of internalizing and externalizing psychopathology
  - Cicchetti & Toth; Lazarus

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### How are Bullies Made?

- Fanti and Kimonis followed 1,416 adolescents from 7<sup>th</sup> grade through 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and found the following three core characteristics of bullies
  - Callous-unemotional traits
  - Narcissism
  - Impulsivity

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### What's the Difference?

- Youth who bully
  - Tend to demonstrate higher levels of conduct problems and dislike of school.
- Youth who are bullied
  - Generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, physical and mental symptoms, and low self-esteem. Specifically males tend to be physically weaker.
- Nansel et. al.

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## Family Influences

- Family factors (structure, relationships, attachment) may be more important intervening factors for younger children, whereas social support from friends and teachers may becoming increasing important for adolescents
  - *Ttofi i et al.*
- Conflict and violence in the home is a training ground for bullying an aggression w/ peers
  - *Dishion & Tipsord; Dodge et al.*

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## Do Prevention Programs Even Work?!

- U.S. Department of Education shows that bullying rates remained stable in the last decade (Lessne and Yanez 2016), and research on bullying prevention programs shows that their effects range from contraindicated to modestly positive.
- Among the potential reasons for the mixed effects may be:
  - *a mechanistic emphasis on campaigns, assessment, reporting, and consequences in traditional bullying prevention programs*
  - *the lack of a developmental perspective*
  - *an emphasis on intervention, rather than the promotion of skills and capacities that support psychological health, interpersonal relationships, and a positive school climate.*
- In addition, focusing on a narrow definition of bullying omits other harmful behaviors, such as violence, aggression, conflicts, micro-aggressions, and rudeness.
- Divecha & Brackett (2019)

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## Intervention (Tier 1)

- *School-wide Expectations and Routines*
- *Teaching*
- *Acknowledgement*
- *Response to Student Misbehaviors*

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## Intervention (Tier 2)

- Allows for rapid access to intervention
- Is consistent with school-wide expectations
- Implements similarly across students
- Allows for frequent feedback and reinforcement of appropriate behavior
- Does not require intensive assessment
- Trains all staff in implementation and referral process
- Uses ongoing data for decision-making as part of a team process
- Able to be linked to academic support
- 2-5 office discipline referrals (ODR)
- Behavior occurs across multiple locations
- Examples:
  - Talking out
  - Minor disruption
  - Lack of work completion

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## Intervention (Tier 3)

- Individualized intervention matched to student's need(s) based on data
- Individual counseling
- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)
  - Below is a summary of the stages involved in a method of conducting an FBA.
    - Describe and define the target behavior in specific, concrete terms
    - Collect information on possible functions of the target behavior
    - Use direct and indirect measures of behavior
    - Check accuracy of behavior measurement
    - Categorize behavior—Is it linked to a skill deficit or a performance deficit?
    - Analyze information to form a hypothesis (conjecture or presumed function)
    - Devise interventions and/or develop a BIP
- Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
- Consultation with multi-agency teams

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## How to Combat Bullying

- Three factors to combat bullying:
  - Individual factors such as social skills and academic strength
  - Family factors such as stability in structure and positive relationships
  - Social support via friendships
- Ttofi, Bowes, Farrington, & Losel

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### Can it be Reversed?

- When victimization desists over time, children and adolescents look less like stable victims and begin to exhibit the adjustment profile of those without a history of victimization, showing a pattern of positive adjustment.
  - *There can be a recovery from victimization if and when the experience ceases*
    - Hanish & Guerra; Juvonen et al.; Smith et al.; Goldbaum et al.

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### Should I Help?

- Should I help?
  - *½ of Finnish junior and middle schoolers said they would help the victim*
  - *½ would do nothing*
  - *Of the ½ that would do nothing, the majority said it was "none of their business"*
- Salmivalli et al (in Finland)

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### What's Really Normal?

- *Bullying is "normative in many group settings but socially unacceptable."*
  - *Smith and Brian (2000). Two decades of research meta analysis*
- *"It is a fundamental democratic right for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in bullying."*
  - *Olweus, p 21*
- *No safe place?!*

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## How can we help?

- Focus should shift from focusing on bully's and victims to "other supporting roles." This would include bystanders.
  - *Salmivalli*

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## How can Institutions help?

- Most effective method involves a whole school approach.
- This includes:
  - *Assessing the problem*
  - *Planning school conference days*
  - *Providing better supervision at recess*
  - *Forming a bullying prevention coordination group*
  - *Encouraging parent-teacher meetings*
  - *Establishing classroom rules against bullying*
  - *Holding classroom meeting about bullying*
  - *Require talk with the bullies and victims*
  - *Scheduling talks w/ the parents of involved students*
- Dake, Price, and Telljohann

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## Quote

- "In conclusion, there is no conclusion to what children who are bullied live with. They take it home w/ them at night. It lives inside them and eats away at them. It never ends. So neither should our struggle to end it."
  - *Sarah, age 16*

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Questions?

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