

# Victims of bullying



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## **Victims of Bullying**

Schools offer more than educational opportunities; they offer many opportunities for social interaction for youth. These social opportunities also offer many opportunities for children to become victims of bullying. In the last ten years, there has been a dramatic rise of research on bullying in the United States. This research has been spurred by continued extreme school violence where the perpetrators of the violence had been victims of bullying.

Bullying encompasses a range of various aggressive behaviors, which are targeted at an identified victim (Espelage, 2002). It is differentiated from fighting because it involves an imbalance in strength such that the individual targeted has difficulty defending him or herself. Bullying has been a common obstacle of childhood for many generations (Olweus, 1995). Many people believe that bullying is a natural part of growing up that does not cause serious harm but help to toughen children up (Pianta & Walsh, 1995). On the other hand, extensive research in this area has identified consequences for the victims of bullying (Olweus, 1995).

There have been many high profile cases of victims of bullying who have retaliated by horrific school shootings (Kumpulamen, Rasanen, & Puura, 2001). A number of recent studies have investigated the immediate and short-term effects of peer victimization (Espelage, 2002; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Rejection from a peer group has been linked to adverse psychological and physical consequences (Kumpulamen et al., 2001). Victims have been noted to be at risk for increased levels of depression, anxiety, and

psychosomatic symptoms (Nansel et al., 2001). School avoidance and feelings of isolation are common among victims. Furthermore, it has been reported that these victims of bullying are developing post-traumatic stress disorder (Kumpulamen et al., 2001). This reveals the detrimental impact that peer rejection may have on youth and the importance of more research on the long-term impact bullying has on victims.

The media has portrayed “ bullies” and “ nerds or geeks” in numerous films, thus bringing awareness of childhood social hierarchies and the desire to be accepted as part of a group. The “ nerds” are social outcast who are commonly victimized by their peers and often blamed for not being tough enough. Recent research and pop culture movies like “ Mean Girls” have brought more attention to girls and their bullying behaviors. There is limited research on the prevalence and effects bullying has on girls (Brinson, 2005).

Many bullies experience mental health difficulties. One study found that one-third of bullies have attention-deficit disorder, 12. 5% were suffering from depression, and 12. 5% had oppositional-conduct disorder (Kumpulamen et al., 2001). Bullies then in turn take out their frustrations on someone they see as weaker than them. These bullies are also seeking to impress their peers. The rejection felt by the victim can have a direct impact on their lives.

Several authors suggest that youth who are continually victimized may be at risk for poorer psychological functioning as adults (Espelage, 2002; Nansel et al., 2001). There has not been much research in this particular area. Little is known about how these victims function as adults. Research suggests that adolescents do not simply grow out of emotional problems with age, which

implies that youth who have poor social skills may continue to experience difficulty in their area of maintaining relationships as adults (Nansel et al., 2001). Espelage (2002) found that many victims of bullying continue to think about their experiences of being bullied and recall painful memories well into adulthood.

Depression and suicidal ideation have been found to be common outcomes of being bullied for both boys and girls. Bullies themselves have been prone to depression (Espelage, 2002). Bullying behaviors has similarly been found to transfer from the classroom to the streets, male bullies having been found to be seventeen times more likely to be frequently violent outside of the classroom and female bullies over one hundred times more likely to be frequently violent on the streets (Brinson, 2005). Longitudinal research has found that bullying and aggressive behavior were identified as being characteristics of those students who later became involved in criminal behavior (Nansel et al., 2001).

#### Statement of Problem

There have been limited mixed-methods studies on the phenomenon of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). There has been no research that has attempted to explore the long term effects of bullying on individuals who have experienced it. This study will use a mixed-methods approach to explore both the long term effects of bullying on individuals that were bullied in their youth.

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this concurrent, mixed methods study is to explore and generate themes about the long term effects bullying, that occurred in childhood, has on men and women. The quantitative research questions will address the prevalence of bullying between male and female participants that they encountered at school when they were in their teens. Qualitative open-ended questions will be used to probe significant resilience factors by exploring aspects of the bullying experiences and how they impacted the person's adult life.

### Theoretical Framework

Several theories have sought to explain the existence of bullying behavior. Some developmental theorists perceive bullying as a child's attempt to establish social dominance over other children. This dominance is established through developmentally appropriate actions; in the early years, when children lack complex social skills, they bully using physical means. As these overt acts are punished by disciplinarians, and as children develop a larger repertoire of verbal language, bullying becomes more verbal in nature. Finally, when children gain the skills to understand and participate in intricate social relationships, they begin to use these relationships as a more covert type of bullying in order to establish power and social dominance (Smith, 2001).

Resilience theory is defined as a person's ability to cope or adapt to stressful situations. In different environments, resilience can have different meanings. In a high crime neighborhood, resilience could mean just surviving unscathed from the violence. This is having the ability to overcome a challenging set of

circumstances with success. Studies in resilience theory demonstrate that resilient individuals are those who grow and develop as a result of trauma. Rather than being stunted by life difficulties, they recover from the traumatic events with an increased sense of empathy, enhanced coping skills. (Pianta & Walsh, 1998).

Peer rejection theory provides an important context for socialization that fosters social skills that children learn and use through out their lives. Rejection theory is based on the premise that children that are rejected by their peers are not given the same opportunities to socialize and develop socialization skills. This further distances them from their peers (Cole & Gillenssen, 1993).

Life course perspective is an appropriate lens to use when reviewing bullying and the after effects it has on the victims of it. Research has shown that bullying can cause victims to have varying degrees of posttraumatic stress syndrome (Houbre et al., 2006). Elder (1998) researched the social pathways in the life course. This research revealed that individual's lives are influenced by their ever-changing effects of their experiences.

#### Research Questions/Null Hypothesis

##### Research Question #1:

How are men and women impacted by the bullying they encountered as youth?

##### Null Hypothesis #1:

There will be no statistical significant difference in how men and women are impacted by bullying that they encountered as youth as measured by the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire.

Research Question #2:

How did bullying as a youth affect men?

Null Hypothesis #2:

There will be no evidence that being bullied in their youth will have an impact on their adult lives as men.

Research Question #3:

How did bullying as a youth affect women?

Null Hypothesis #3:

There will be no evidence that being bullied in their youth will have an impact on their adult lives as women.

Research Question #4:

What are the implications in their current life that they feel resulted from the bullying they encountered as youth?

Null Hypothesis #4:

There will be no statistically significant evidence of implications in their current life that were a result from bullying that they encountered as youth.

Research Question #5:

How do they feel their bullying experiences impacts their ability to socialize with people now?

Null Hypothesis #5:

There will be no evidence that bullying experiences in their past will impact an adult's ability to socialize with other people.

Definition of Terms

Bully/victims: individuals who both bully others and are victims of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Bullying: aggressive behavior that occurs repeatedly over time and includes both physical and emotional acts that are directed towards another individual with the intent to inflict harm or discomfort (Olweus, 1993).

Bystander: individual who observes a bullying incident (Olweus, 1993).

Emotional Scarring: the association of negative feelings with the recollection of painful memories of being bullied (Espelage, 2002).

Peer: an individual belonging to the same groups based on age, grade, and status (Olweus, 1993).

Victim of Bullying: an individual who is exposed repeatedly over time to aggressive behavior that is inflicted by his peers with the intent to cause harm or discomfort (Espelage, 2002; Olweus, 1993).



## Assumptions

The assumptions made about the participants in this study are that they are of sound mind to participate in this study.

The assumptions made that all of the participants will answer the web survey honestly.

The assumptions made that all of the participants were bullied in their youth.

## Delimitations

The research recognizes the following delimitations for the study:

- The sample size will be dependent of the amount of people who respond to the email of inquiry at this study.
- All respondents are mentally competent to answer the questions in the online survey.
- The participants have the potential to be spread out across the United States.

## Limitations

Quantitative research looks for generalizability of the research findings to the larger population (Crestwell, 2005). Generalizability is not as important to qualitative research that is seeking to explore a phenomenon and the impact it has. If more men respond than women to this survey, then it would not be an equally distributed sample. Socio-economic status is not asked in this study.