

## **The Psychological Effects of Bullying on Adolescents and Strategies for Mitigation**

Rui Qu

UWC Changshu China

The Northeastern University London Essay Competition

January 3, 2025

## **The Psychological Effects of Bullying on Adolescents and Strategies for Mitigation**

Bullying remains a critical issue among adolescents all around the world, affecting millions each year. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), about 20% of students ages 12-18 experience bullying, with 15% reporting being bullied online. This problem not only brings physical harm to adolescents but also impacts the mental health of those who experience bullying. Adolescents who face bullying are at a higher risk for developing psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Nansel et al., 2001). The emotional scars left by bullying can lead to long-term consequences, affecting academic performance and social relationships.

Understanding the psychological effects of bullying is essential for addressing this issue effectively. Victims may experience feelings of isolation, fear, and helplessness, which can lead to serious mental health disorders if left unchecked (Holt et al., 2015). Studies have shown that bullied adolescents are at a greater risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, highlighting the urgent need for intervention (Rosen et al., 2018).

Addressing bullying is essential for fostering a healthier, more supportive environment for all students. Solutions can include implementing comprehensive anti-bullying programs in schools that promote empathy and resilience, providing support systems such as counseling and peer mentoring, and encouraging open communication among students, teachers, and parents (Olweus, 1993). By taking proactive steps, communities can mitigate the psychological effects of bullying and create a safer atmosphere for adolescents to thrive.

## **Types of Bullying and Their Psychological Impact**

### **Physical Bullying**

The most common type of bullying is physical bullying, which involves direct physical actions aimed at harming another individual. This can involve actions like shoving, kicking, hitting, or causing damage to someone else's property. In addition to causing immediate bodily pain, physical bullying brings the victim severe emotional distress (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). Fear, anxiety, and depression are common emotions experienced by victims of physical bullying, and these can have a lasting impact on their general well-being and mental health (Wolke & Lereya, 2019). According to research, children who experience physical bullying are more likely to experience anxiety disorders and depression as well as psychosomatic problems including headaches and stomachaches (Wolke & Lereya, 2019). Furthermore, because victims may withdraw or be unwilling to participate in school activities, the effects of physical bullying can go beyond the immediate harm and have an influence on social connections and academic performance (*How Does Bullying Affect Health? Bullying Can | Chegg.com, 2019*).

### **Social Bullying and Verbal Bullying**

Further, social bullying and verbal bullying frequently happen at the same time, which has a compounding effect on the victim. Verbal bullying is when someone is made fun of or mocked by using offensive language, such as name-calling, teasing, or insulting. Verbal bullying often occurs together with the strategies employed to damage the victim's self-esteem during these social attacks. For example, the bully may use insulting words or insulting names when spreading false tales, which might worsen the victim's distress (Wang et al., 2009). On the other hand, social bullying aims to damage a person's standing in a group and their social relationships.

It includes actions like gossiping, excluding someone from social circles, or destroying friendships in order to isolate a target. Bullying of these kinds has similar psychological effects on the victim, creating some serious negative effects on a person's mental health and sense of self-worth (Marshall-Seslar, 2023). For example, victims will frequently suffer from increased anxiety and sadness, which results in feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem or even result in social withdrawal (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). In severe circumstances, the psychological impact might be intolerable, which may result in suicidal thoughts or self-harm (Man et al., 2022). Chronic mental health problems that last until adulthood are another potential long-term effect, emphasizing the necessity of efficient interventions and support services. (Marshall-Seslar, 2023b).

### **Cyberbullying**

Lastly, cyberbullying has become more common as the internet and technology develop. The bully will utilize digital platforms to harass or intimidate individuals through messages, social media, or other online interactions, making it pervasive and often anonymous. Furthermore, bullies can use cyberbullying to fill their inner void and let out their rage without fear of being caught, even if they are insecure. As a result, since cyberbullying is often anonymous for the bully, the bully has a lesser chance of being caught or the need to pay back the victim for the harm they created. (Shetgiri, 2013). Even in safe environments, victims may find it difficult to escape the bullying. Cyberbullying can also seriously damage self-esteem, as victims can take in insults and negative comments, which results in a diminished sense of self-worth. The emotional distress caused by cyberbullying frequently causes social withdrawal, as victims may feel unsafe or reluctant to engage with peers, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and depression.

## **Psychological Effects of Bullying**

Bullying has been one of the biggest issues globally when addressing the mental being of adolescents. According to analyzed data from 65 countries, the prevalence of bullying among adolescents aged 12-17 was found to be approximately 32.03%, with verbal bullying being the most common form and having the most detrimental effects on mental health (Man et al., 2022). The psychological effects of bullying on adolescents can be profound and long-lasting and it is crucial to understand the effects that it could bring to the victim in order to address and solve this problem. Varying for each individual, victims of bullying can experience different levels of anxiety, depression, or even suicidal ideation. Research indicates that adolescents who are bullied are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues than those who have never experienced bullying before (Källmén & Hallgren, 2021). The effects of bullying can be mental or physical or both. Bullying victims are more likely to experience anxiety disorders and sadness, which may continue long after the bullying has stopped, according to studies (Källmén & Hallgren, 2021).

Furthermore, adopting bullies' negative comments can seriously harm one's sense of self, which fosters an endless cycle of emotional suffering and self-doubt (Man et al., 2022). Meanwhile, bullying can have just as serious physical effects, particularly when it comes to suicidal thoughts. Due to the severe mental stress caused by their peers, victims of bullying may be more likely to engage in suicidal thoughts and self-harm. According to research, victims of bullying are much more sensitive than non-victims regarding, planning, or attempting suicide (Nansel et al., 2001). Because bullying is so persistent, victims may feel helpless and consider

suicide as a possible way to end their suffering (Nansel et al., 2001). Lastly, it is crucial to address solutions that can prevent bullying or stop this risky behavior as soon as possible.

### **Mechanisms of Bullying and Strategies for Mitigation**

To bring up effective strategies for mitigation, we need to understand the mechanisms of bullying. Bowlby's attachment theory, which emphasizes the relationship between a child and its caregiver, suggests that bullying behavior may be more common in children who have insecure attachments, as these children may struggle with emotional regulation, empathy, and forming healthy social relationships. For example, to make up for feelings of neglect, a youngster who has not gotten enough love and support from caregivers may act hostilely against peers. They conduct violent actions, and it makes them feel fulfilled or satisfied. Some people who are insecure or who grew up in an environment with no care and love can adopt bullying when they grow older to get attention. Even though it is crucial to understand why certain people bully, it is also important that we know how to address this kind of problem and solve it.

It is also important to know that according to the General Strain Theory, people who are under stress or strain—from social, financial, or familial demands, are more likely to carry out bullying or aggressiveness. According to the hypothesis, individuals who are under these stresses could react aggressively if they don't have enough coping strategies or support networks. When people don't know how to handle stress or dissatisfaction healthily, bullying turns into a maladaptive coping strategy.

Based on the mechanisms of bullying mentioned above, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is especially useful for addressing the bully's underlying beliefs and actions. In addition to teaching people how to act in healthy ways, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) assists people in

recognizing and disputing negative thought patterns. Bullies can learn how to restrain their impulsive behavior and communicate assertively instead of violently through CBT-based anger management programs. Meanwhile, CBT can also assist victims of bullying by reframing negative ideas, enhancing their sense of self, and creating coping mechanisms to deal with bullying.

In addition, schools should implement anti-bullying programs that include education, teacher training, clear policies, and peer mediation; they should also promote diversity, mentorship, and extracurricular activities to create a positive and inclusive environment. Mitigating bullying also calls for a comprehensive, multifaceted approach that involves communities, families, and schools (Shetgiri, 2013). The psychological impacts and main causes of bullying can be addressed by counseling services for both bullies and victims, such as trauma therapy, anger management, and empathy training (Källmén et al., 2015). By participating in awareness workshops, modeling positive conduct, and maintaining open lines of communication, parents and other caregivers can play a critical role (Källmén et al., 2015). Lastly, digital literacy training, reporting systems, and cooperation with tech companies to track and stop harmful online activity are all part of the solution to cyberbullying (Man et al., 2022).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, bullying has a serious negative impact on the general and mental health of adolescents. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts are among the psychological problems that become worse by physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying. A comprehensive strategy that includes therapies, support networks, and prevention programs is needed to address this problem. Society can make adolescence safer and more inclusive by encouraging empathy, resilience, and open communication.

## References

- Arseneault, L. (2018). Annual Research Review: The persistent and pervasive impact of being bullied in childhood and adolescence: Implications for policy and practice. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 59(4), 405–421. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12841>
- Digital, kaylo. (2024, July 5). Types of Bullying - PREVNet. PREVNet. <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/types-of-bullying/>
- Holt, M. K., Kaufman Kantor, G., & Finkelhor, D. (2015). Parent/child concordance about bullying involvement and family characteristics related to bullying and peer victimization. *Journal of School Violence*, 8(1), 42–63.
- Källmén, H., & Hallgren, M. (2021). Bullying at school and mental health problems among adolescents: A repeated cross-sectional study. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-021-00425-y>
- Man, X., Liu, J., & Xue, Z. (2022). Effects of bullying forms on adolescent mental health and protective factors: A global cross-regional research based on 65 countries. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2374. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042374>
- Marshall-Seslar, A. (2023, August 9). Words hurt: Verbal bullying definition, effects, and prevention. McMillen Health. <https://www.mcmillenhealth.org/tamtalks/verbal-bullying>
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *JAMA*, 285(16), 2094–2100.



Shetgiri, R. (2013). Bullying and victimization among children. *Advances in Pediatrics*, 60(1), 33–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yapd.2013.04.004>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2021, May 21). Effects of bullying. Stopbullying.gov. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/effects>

Wang, J., Iannotti, R. J., & Nansel, T. R. (2009). School bullying among adolescents in the United States: Physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45(4), 368–375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.03.021>

Wolke, D., & Lereya, S. T. (2019). Long-term effects of bullying. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 100(9), 879–885. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2014-306667>

What is bullying. (n.d.). Southern Local Schools. <https://www.southern.k12.oh.us/bullying>