

Background: The Impact of Teen Bullying on Adolescents

by

Marcus B. Waters

University of Pittsburgh

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According to Austin and Sciarra (2010), bullying refers to any situation where an individual is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself. This paper discussed the controversial issue of bullying, a problem in our society that has equally affected countless individuals of different races, religious beliefs, and ages.

According to Austin and Sciarra (2010), most individuals who are bullied and those who bully others possess certain characteristics, however, the seriousness and pervasiveness of their situation depends mostly on their environment. Some of the different factors that may determine an individual's environmental impact on aggressive behavior toward others includes living conditions and tolerance of authority figures toward violence. According to Olweus (1996), some additional factors that are often linked to bully-like behavior include peer influence, having extremely low self-esteem, having a positive view of violence, and also not being involved enough in school or school related activities. Similar to individuals with risk factors for being bullies, adolescents who are at risk for being bullied have many characteristics as well. Olweus (1996) stated that a few of the reasons that many victims of bullying have for being harassed or ridiculed by others includes not being as popular as their peers, being shy and withdrawn, having poor social skills, and also having a different sexual orientation than what is considered the norm.

Research has indicated that there is a direct connection between bullying roles and the everyday interactions of children (Murphy and Faulkner, 2011). One of the biggest roadblocks for researchers, parents, teachers, and many anti-bullying activists has been being able to figure out and understand why children adopt these roles. In a study conducted by Murphy and Faulkner (2011), the researchers investigated the behavior and communication of seven -to eight

-year old children during a dyadic computer task with the goal of comparing the behavior and communication of bullies and defenders when working on an interactive task, and examining the behavior and communication of the non-role partners of the bullies and defenders on this task. The comparison method that this study used is crucial to further research because it helps to provide some possible explanations for how individuals who do not fall into the category of bully or victim might be influenced by children that exhibit these specific behaviors. The results from Murphy and Faulkner's (2011) study indicated that the roles that children adopt in relation to bullying influence their behavior in other, non-bullying contexts.

One of the most controversial forms of bullying that exists in our society today is bullying based on gender. Sexual prejudice or and gay bullying is something that high school boys and young men in particular, have struggled with for many years. According to Naugler (2010), North American children, especially boys, have been subjected to threats of violence by older peers for generations. This is primarily because a stigma associated with individuals who are homosexual or bisexual continues to linger throughout our society. Naugler (2010) talked about a young man from Nova Scotia who was verbally harassed and beaten on his first day of high school simply because he was wearing a pink shirt. The reactions of the individuals who harassed this high school student are truly indicative of how many people still view anyone or anything that may be different in their eyes. For example, Naugler (2010) explains that within the gendered stereotypes of contemporary North American society, pink on a boy is at once shorthand for effeminacy and homosexuality, a disruption of common sense gendered attributes, and an invitation for peer group policing. Over the past few years, being homosexual has become a word that is overwhelmingly associated with something negative by many individuals who use the term. Naugler (2010) pointed out that in the teenage vernacular, "gay" is a fairly common

synonym for “stupid”. The word refers not only to a gender, but it is also used as a word to insult someone. For example, many teenagers often use the word gay to describe someone that they do not like. Naugler (2010) stated that there is no distinction between bullying someone because they are gay and bullying someone by calling them gay.

Research conducted by Farrington and Ttofi (2011) supports the notion that bullying leads to violence later on in life. For quite some time, bullying has been synonymous with violence in our society. The researchers in this article examined the relationship of early bully-like behavior and outcomes later in life. Farrington and Ttofi (2011) concluded that bullying might increase the likelihood of these later outcomes, and that interventions that decrease bullying would most likely be followed by decreases in violent offending, drug use, and unsuccessful lives. Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder tend to be irritable and aggressive and may repeatedly get into physical fights or commit acts of physical assault (American Psychological Association [DSM-IV-TR], 2000). Therefore, a person’s decision-making ability becomes impacted by their anger.

Austin and Sciarra (2010) explained that there is a strong need for helpful options in addressing bullying as a school-wide issue because bullying is a problem that occurs mostly in school settings. Students across the country have reported bullying not just from their peers, but from their teachers in the classroom as well. Austin and Sciarra (2010) reported that four research interventions that have demonstrated success in reducing bullying are (1) the Olweus Bullying prevention program, (2) A general semantics Approach to School-Age Bullying, (3) A Human Rights Approach to Bullying Prevention, and (4) A Change the school Approach.

The Olweus bullying prevention program that Austin and Sciarra (2010) talk about is considered to be one of the most effective and comprehensive interventions for use in schools.

The overall purpose of the Olweus Bullying Program is to provide effective intervention at various levels that may be beneficial to both individuals who bully and also those affected in some way by acts of bullying. According to Austin and Sciarra (2010), the program operates with interventions targeting three Levels: (1) the school, (2) the classroom, and (3) the individual (including the bully, the target, and the parents of both).

The General Semantics Approach to School-Age Bullying that was discussed in Austin and Sciarra (2010) primarily focuses on giving teachers, students, school administrators, and other staff the opportunity to describe their own personal experiences with bullying with the goal of developing solutions to these problems. Many individuals who have had experiences with bullying have experienced it in different ways. Focusing on individual experiences related to bullying will undoubtedly allow researchers and others linked to this problem to develop effective intervention techniques and treatment strategies to specific contexts of bullying behavior.

The next approach to bullying that Austin and Sciarra (2010) discussed was the Human Rights Approach to Bullying prevention. According to Austin and Sciarra (2010), successful bullying treatment and prevention relies largely on the part of parents, school staff, instructors, and administrators. In other words, it is crucial for students, teachers, as well as school administrators to have social awareness of school-based bullying. Austin and Sciarra (2010) noted that educating students about human rights and human rights infractions includes providing assignments that require the student to investigate situations of human rights abuses and also construct effective ways to address them. If students are able to witness real examples of abuse with their own eyes, they may be more likely to know what to do the next time that they are confronted by a bully, try to bully someone, or are just a witness to the incident taking place.

It was also recommended in Austin and Sciarra (2010) that administrators and teachers be provided with ongoing professional development in the area of bullying identification and prevention techniques.

Lastly, Austin and Sciarra (2010) noted that there should be a change in the school approach to bullying. In any situation where bullying occurs in a school setting, it is crucial for teachers, faculty, and administrators to be actively involved in making decisions regarding the implementation of prevention plans. These individuals know their students very well through observing them on a daily basis and can assess the effects of various preventative strategies. The school approach to bullying strategy also recommends three components to eliminate bullying in schools: (1) creating a positive and bully-free environment, (2) educating students about different ways to combat violence and bullying, and (3) training teachers on how to effectively manage bullying in the classroom.

The strong impact that bullying has had on teenagers and young adults has become a very serious problem in schools across the United States. Various studies have documented both the short term and long term effects that often arise as a result of teenage bullying. Numerous awareness and prevention programs are currently in place to help alleviate the problem of teen bullying. Research has consistently found that educating students about the seriousness of teen bullying and training school staff on how to prevent bullying is key to putting an end to this problem. Furthermore, research also suggests that teachers and administrators should be directly involved in the overall process of dealing with bullying in schools.

## References

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