

Age Trends in the Prevalence of Bullying

Although the majority of children do not bully others and are not victimized by peers, at every age and grade some children and youth experience bullying. The rates vary depending on the type of bullying, as well as gender. Involvement in bullying and victimization tends to decrease with age. Researchers across several countries have investigated age trends in bullying and victimization and have come to similar conclusions.

Key Research Findings

- Today, an estimated 200 million children and youth around the world are being victimized by their peers.
- It is estimated that 10-15 % of children repeatedly bully others, and 10-15% of children are repeatedly bullied.^{1,2be}
- Younger children in elementary and middle schools are more likely to bully others than older children in high school.³ Generally, there is a decrease in bullying as children grow older.⁴
 - Physical bullying declines with age, while verbal, social, and cyber bullying tend to increase between the ages of 11 and 15.^{5,6}
 - Bullying tends to be a peak in the 9th grade with the school transition.^{7,8}
 - Girls tend to begin using social forms of bullying at earlier ages than boys.⁹
 - The increase in social, verbal and cyber bullying may be due to puberty, school changes, and/or the development of social skills, which provide the opportunity for both positive social interactions and social deception.¹⁰
- When asked whether they have been bullied, younger children tend to report higher levels of victimization compared to older children.¹¹ Hence there is a decrease in victimization as children grow older.¹²
 - Children report a peak in victimization at the end of middle school and entering into the 9th grade, followed by a decline as high school proceeds.^{13,14,15}
 - Although victimization tends to decline (physical forms in particular), verbal victimization (name calling, teasing about appearance, etc.) tends to remain at high rates throughout the high school years.¹⁶
- Children who are only victimized by peers tend to be younger than children who both bully others and are victimized.¹⁷

Key Themes

- Bullying is a global public health and social problem.
- Bullying and victimization occur more frequently among younger than older students, and peak during the middle school grades.
- Although there is a general decrease in bullying as children grow older, this decrease is most dramatic for physical bullying. In contrast, verbal, social and electronic forms of bullying appear to linger for longer, well into the high school years.

Implications

Education

- Teachers and adults working with young children should be trained to identify, understand, and successfully manage bullying episodes.¹⁸

Assessment

- Assessment of bullying in schools should reflect the age group of the children or adolescents involved, and should focus on different forms of bullying that can occur at all ages.

Prevention and Intervention

- Different age groups require more intensive prevention and intervention efforts. Prevention and intervention programs must be started early in life, before bullying rates increase.
- Different age groups may require increased focused on specific forms types of bullying. For example, high school students may require a focus on verbal, social, and electronic bullying.

Policy

- Government legislators for education need to establish policies that ensure prevention and intervention programs are instituted within primary and secondary schools, to ensure that bullying behaviors and aggressive interaction patterns are addressed before they become entrenched.

¹ Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. E. (2006). Bullying and the gifted: Victims, perpetrators, prevalence, and effects. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(2), 148-168.

² Scheithauer, H., Hayer, T., Petermann, F., & Jugert, G. (2006). Physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying among German students: Age trends, gender differences, and correlates. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*(3), 261-275.

³ Fitzpatrick, K. M., Dulin, A. J., Piko, & B. F. (2007). Not just pushing and shoving: School bullying among African American adolescents. *Journal of School Health, 77*(1), 16-22.

⁴ Due, P., Holstein, B.E., Lynch, J, Diderichsen, F., Gabhain, S.N., Scheidt, P., Currie, C. & The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Bullying Working Group. (2005). Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children: international comparative cross sectional study in 28 countries. *European Journal of Public Health, 15*(2), 128-132.

⁵ Archer, J., & Cote, S. (2005). Sex differences in aggressive behavior. In R. E. Tremblay, W. W. Hartup, & J. Archer (Eds.), *Developmental origins of aggression* (pp. 425–443). New York: Guilford Press. As cited in Stassen Berger, K. (2007). Update on bullying at school: Science forgotten? *Developmental Review, 27*(1), 90-126.

⁶ Espelage, D. L., Meban, S. E., & Swearer, S. M. (2004). Gender differences in bullying: Moving beyond mean level differences. In D. L. Espelage & S. M. Swearer (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention* (pp. 15–35). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. As cited in Stassen Berger, K. (2007). Update on bullying at school: Science forgotten? *Developmental Review, 27*(1), 90-126.

⁷ Peskin, M. F., Tortolero, S. R., & Markham, C. M. (2006). Bullying and victimization among Black and Hispanic adolescents. *Adolescence, 41*(163), 467-484.

⁸ Brown, S. L., Birch, D. A., & Kancherla, V. (2005). Bullying perspectives: experiences, attitudes, and recommendations of 9- to 13-year-olds attending health education centers in the United States. *Journal of School Health, 75*(10), 384-92.

⁹ Crick, N. R., Nelson, D. A., Morales, J. R., Cullerton-Sen, C., Casas, J. F., & Hickman, S. E. (2001). Relational victimization in childhood and adolescence. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and the victimized* (pp. 196–214). New York: Guilford Press. As cited in Stassen Berger, K. (2007). Update on bullying at school: Science forgotten? *Developmental Review, 27*(1), 90-126.

¹⁰ Smith, P.K., Madsen, K. C., & Moody, J. C. (1999). What causes the age decline in reports of being bullied at school? Towards a developmental analysis of risks of being bullied. *Educational Research, 41*, 267-285. As cited in Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. E. (2006). Bullying and the gifted: Victims, perpetrators, prevalence, and effects. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(2), 148-168.

¹¹ See note 3 above.

¹² See note 4 above.

¹³ See note 7 above.

¹⁴ Zaborskis, A., Cirtautiene, L., & Zemaitiene, N. (2005). Bullying in Lithuanian schools in 1994-2002. *Medicina (Kaunas, Lithuania), 41*(7), 614-20.

¹⁵ See note 8 above.

¹⁶ See note 10 above.

¹⁷ Stein, J. A., Dukes, R. L., & Warren, J. I. (2007). Adolescent male bullies, victims, and bully-victims: A comparison of psychosocial and behavioral characteristics. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 32*(3), 273-82.

¹⁸ See note 8 above.